

## ‘Hate’ Is A Strong Word

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### Summary

Pepper’s intern is the most annoying kid he’s ever met, in Tony’s opinion. So why can’t anyone else see that this ‘angel’ is anything but? Peter Parker really is a thorn in his side.

### Notes

another story ☺ ☺ Hope you all like it!

Tw- gun violence + minor character death

## Peter Parker: A backstory.

Pepper Potts met little Parker Parker, the light of her days, when he was only eight-years-old at the, now infamous, Stark Expo. She remembered watching Tony fly around the skies with a deep fear in her gut. Seeing the little boy, with a cardboard mask over his face, that panic just grew. The crash of a drone nearby resonated across the Stark Expo's set, making Pepper flinch and look away. When her eyes moved back to the kid, she saw Tony patting him on the head. Her heart had never beaten as much as it did in that moment, as Tony flew up and left the young child alone (to obsess over the fact that he might have powers that he didn't know about).

A high pitch, feminine, voice took Pepper out of her thoughts. She looked to her side, to see a young couple running up to the boy. The unnamed kid jumped into the blonde man's arms, grinning widely as the adult took the mask away. The boy's smile was not one that a kid in a battlefield should wear, but this boy did. He radiated innocence with his big wide, brown, eyes, and Pepper's heart might've melted just a little as he began to tell these two people about what had just happened.

Pepper decided she needed to speak to these two, as a kid that wonderful was not somebody she was about to give up on. She composed herself in a second, in which she had perfected over the years, and took steps towards the group that had just reunited (as soon as the battle had come to a close).

"Hello?" Pepper said, waiting for the adults to turn her way. When the young woman gaped at her, obviously in shock that she was stood there, she offered her a gentle, warm, grin. "The name's Pepper Potts."

"Oh, we know," The man hummed, chuckling to himself when the woman elbowed him in the gut. "The name's Ben Parker. This beautiful lady here, my wife, is May. The little guy's named Peter, he's our nephew."

"And apparently, he's also a superhero," Pepper gasped, putting a hand out for the kid to take, "I'm honoured to meet you, Peter."

The giggle that came out of the boy's mouth could've softened the harshest of people. He took Pepper's hand, shaking it as if he was a serious businessman.

"You think that I am a superhero?" Peter asked.

And, oh, that voice. It was high pitch, because of course it was. Pepper wanted to reach forward and squeeze those cheeks until he told her to stop, as she was incredibly professional. She simply smiled at the kid in Ben's arms, nodding enthusiastically at his question.

"Oh, Mr Peter, I know you are," Pepper said, in her 'serious tone', "I wanted to come over here and do a mission briefing, however. As it's very important for superheroes, like you, to tell people if they're okay. Mr Stark has to do it with me, even if he doesn't like to."

"Well, Miss Potts!" Peter beamed, with that toothy smile. "I saw all the drones and I ran over to them, because that's what people like me do! I put my mask on, as sometimes holding a secret identity is so important! Then, suddenly, the drones just goes boom! I think I did it with my mind! Then, as if this day couldn't get cooker, Mr Stark told me that I did a good job!"

"That sounds wonderful," May said, her voice more of a strain. She clearly didn't find this as

entertaining as Ben did, if the fear in her face had anything to say about it. “Did you get hurt?” She added, glancing over the kid who was still up in her husband’s arms.

“Nope! I’m indestructible!” Peter said, looking at May as if that was the most obvious statement.

Pepper turned to see Tony out of the suit, walking into a car with a crestfallen look. She took one look back at trio next to her and decided, in one moment, that she’d like to stay in contact. Passing one of her business cards to May, she asked her to call whenever she needed to speak to someone.

When Pepper got to the car, Tony looked at her with a frown. She knew that something was going on in her partner’s head, scared from what just happened. But she also knew Tony very well, and he’d never want to talk about it (at least, not yet), so she stayed quiet.

“Who were they?” Tony questioned, as Happy pulled away from the curb.

Pepper looked back to see May crouched on the floor, hugging Peter to her chest. She smiled slightly to herself, before looking back at Tony. “Oh, they were just here for the expo.”

Throughout the next couple of years, the Parker family became a huge part of Pepper’s life. Whenever Tony went out, almost killing himself in the process, or drank himself into a state, she’d call May and vent to her.

Pepper and May’s coffee days were some of the best evenings the CEO had, and she felt as if she could call this woman her best friend.

Peter became like a surrogate son to Pepper, always making her feel better whenever she was down. Tony didn’t know it, but all the drawings she had in their kitchen were sent directly from her biggest fan. He just thought she really liked some random kid’s artwork.

She was there for every big moment of Peter’s life. She came to his ‘middle school graduation’, a little event held by the school principal, and gave him (and his best friend, Ned) a whole bunch of gifts to congratulate them.

When Peter got into Midtown high school, Pepper threw him a little party to celebrate. She also took the liberty of giving May and Ben some money towards the costs, not taking no for an answer. May wasn’t too happy about it, but Pepper didn’t care.

Peter Parker’s fourteen birthday party was a huge celebration, but the three adults that cared for him noticed a shift in his personality as he grew. The happy-go-lucky boy that they loved shifted into a secretive, bruised, teenager who loved to sneak out. May’s worry was evident in the way she texted. When Pepper got a call from Ben, worried, Pepper knew that things were getting bad.

The kid’s mind was incredible and, sometimes, Pepper wondered if the kid shared an intellect like her partner did. All of that information should be useful for something, in Pepper’s opinion. So, from that moment on, she hired the teen as her intern to channel his mind into something proactive.

His internship underneath Miss Potts was brilliant, bringing out his mind. He didn’t go into the labs, as much as he wanted to. His mind was very much focused on science, bettering the world, but Pepper didn’t work in that area. He took calls for her, organised paper work and helped out with the administration side of the company.

It was fun work, but Peter could feel himself yearning for the other side. When he’d watch a group of the interns walk by him, all dressed up in lab coats, he’d stop and think of how that could be him. He felt bad for wanting to be away from Pepper, but... it was just a dream of his... to be like Tony Stark.

Peter, however, did not like Tony Stark. He didn't enjoy how arrogant the man was, or how he treated Pepper during the first years of their relationship. Peter was protective of his "mother" and had been known to make sure others knew how brilliant she was. Pepper was honoured, but still... she stayed with Tony. Peter couldn't blame her, he was (deep down, very, very, deep down) a caring man. Or, well, he would be if he wasn't so suppressed.

Peter had seen him in the halls, at times, but as other people stopped to crowd him, Peter would always keep walking. He hated being mean, he just had better things to be doing.

Better things entailed sitting at the desk, telling random people "Stark Industries, this is Peter," over and over again. If this was supposed to stop him from sneaking out, they really needed to up their game.

Peter knew Ben was upset with him. It made Peter sad that he was. They argued a lot, more than they ever had done before. They used to be the three musketeers, united together. But, now? Peter wasn't so sure the man even wanted him around (if his shouting had anything to do with it).

But of course he did. Later on, May told Peter (no, reassured) that all Ben did was love him. His screaming wasn't malicious, it was fear. When Peter wasn't safe, Ben couldn't breathe. The boy was his world. His family meant everything to him. Peter would reply to her, asking her that if he cared so much... why on earth did he put himself in front of that bullet?

The unthinkable happened in the middle of a September evening. She got the call in her office on a quiet day. September's always were, in Pepper's opinion. All that Pepper could remember was that May was inconsolable, sobbing harshly down the phone line. When she finally got the words through, Pepper felt as if someone was pushing down on her chest. Her heart burst. Ben Parker, the man who was smart, attentive and funny, was dead. Shot pointblank in the middle of a supermarket.

And Peter? He watched him die. He was the last person who spoke to him. He was the one that saw the light go from his Uncle's eyes, as he screamed and begged for him to hold on. Dressed in a red jacket, which Peter knew as half of his Spider-man suit, Ben's blood poured into the fabric. Peter didn't care, he just wanted Ben to breathe. But, no. He went limp in Peter's small arms, his head falling back as he whispered "I love you, Peter. Take care of May for me." And, then, after saving someone's life (as he always did), he let his eyes shut.

Going over to the Parker's apartment that night, Peter didn't take a step out of his room. The two women listened to him cry, as they did themselves. The lights didn't turn on, a rather ironic storm raging outside. What a day to die on, May told Pepper as she huddled close to the fireplace. Pepper had never seen her friend, strong May Parker, so defeated. It hurt, it really did.

The only noise that the neighbourhood could hear, for months after the man's death, was crying. The whole street mourned the former police officer, offering support for the Parker family. And suddenly, as if he had been there all along, the superhero Spider-man emerged from the shadows and kept their streets safe (as if he took the mantle of Ben Parker, the man they all knew and loved). The hole the man left was wide, but people decided to take that into their own hands and create a legacy for him that he'd be proud of.

Peter's moods, his secrecy, just worsened since that day. May struggled, becoming a single parent over night, to try and help him through it, but she was struggling too much herself to help like he needed. Pepper became the backbone of the family, spending more and more time with the mourning teenager.

Tony's first, proper, meeting with Peter Parker wasn't planned. He walked into his partner's office,

straight from his lab, and expected her to be alone. But, instead, he saw a teenager with wild, curly, hair sat on top of her desk with a smile on his face (his arms moving wildly as he spoke to her, explaining something about ‘flash’, whoever that was).

“Hello?” Tony asked, poking his head through the door. He saw Peter, immediately straightening up. He didn’t know who the kid was, so he felt as if he had to put his ‘mask’ on, the way he acted with people he couldn’t trust. “Got those papers, Pep. DUM-E might have spilt some oil on it, but don’t blame him. He doesn’t know what he’s doing.”

Peter looked over at him, as if he knew that he was about to walk in. It freaked him out a little, making him shuffle awkwardly on his feet. Pepper walked around the desk, taking those papers from his hand. She leant forward, kissed him on the cheek, and turned back to the boy in the room.

“Tony, meet Peter Parker. Pete’s my personal intern/assistant who I’ve known for a very, very, long time,” She said, putting an arm around her shoulders. “He’s a lovely kid, I think you two will get along. Pete, I think you know who this is.”

As soon as Pepper left the room, saying something about coming right back, Peter’s sweet smile dropped from his face. He stared at Tony, at the man he used to look up to, with a scowl. He had eavesdropped in too many of Pepper and May’s conversations, learning about the bad things Tony had done, to idolise the hero in front of him.

Tony looked at him, a little frightened, “Um, hello? You’re a bit intimidating for a little baby, aren’t you?”

Peter rolled his eyes, looking too much like Pepper, and crossed his arms. He looked Tony up and down, shaking his head as he did. “I’m not a baby, Mr Stark. Honestly, I thought I was going to have a good day today. Interning with Miss Potts, buildings some legos with Ned, but then you waltz in.”

“Excuse me?” Tony blubbered, a bit taken back. His mouth was slightly askew, a bit taken back that this kid was speaking to him like that. “Someone woke up on the wrong side of the bed this morning,” He muttered, noticing how Peter took another set (intimidating).

“Don’t think I don’t know what you’re like, Mr Stark. Miss Potts’ does everything here, she is the real hero,” Peter said, (and again, rolling his eyes), “But, no offence.” (Offence taken, Tony thought). “I mean, I don’t want to be rude.. it’s just- she means a lot to me.”

“Yeah, same here,” Tony pointed out, glancing over at the door, silently begging for her to come back. He had a list of reasons why he didn’t speak to kids, and the kid just listened them all off in one. “So, uh, Pete- an intern, huh? Didn’t even know she had one.”

“Exactly,” Peter said underneath his breath. He was about to say something else, but interrupted himself. Tony looked at him, confused, but realised the door was opening again (he didn’t know how the kid knew she was coming, but he didn’t care). Suddenly, that cheery smile was plastered on again (stealing Tony’s defences) and he was acting like they were deep in conversation. “So, as I was saying- oh Miss Potts!”

Pepper put her arms out, looking like she wanted a hug. Tony went to take the embrace, when the kid butted in front of him and decided it was his hug to take. Tony watched, his lips pursed (just in case he said anything). This kid was going to be trouble.

He was looking straight at him, as his tiny, stupid, head was rested on top of Pepper’s shoulders. The look he gave Tony screamed ‘I won’ and if it wasn’t illegal to punch people/kids, Peter Parker

would be knocked out on the floor. Or not. He wouldn't do that (probably).

As soon as 'little angel' Peter Parker was out of the room, doing his little chores, Tony turned to watch Pepper who looked as she had just witnessed a divine miracle. He scoffed, shaking his head.

"What?" She said, turning to him with that serious look that always made him feel just a little queasy.

"He's a little shit," Tony explained, leaning back on the chair that he just sat on. When Pepper glared, he realised he had just said the wrong thing. "I mean, uh, he's- he's great, Pep! Such a great kid, who might also be an evil mastermind."

"You don't like him?" She asked, with a forlorn look that made guilt eat Tony up immediately.  
"How? He's an angel, Tony. Honestly."

"Oh, yeah," Tony chuckled, "Such an angel. An angel who's out to get me, Pepper."

"Come on, Tony," Pepper responded, shaking her head at him. "Out to get you? He's fourteen-years-old and I've known him since he was eight, I think I'd know if he was a villain in the making."

"You think you'd know, but these things just happen. Pepper, my love, whatever would I do without you? I'd have to avenge you, you know that... right?" Tony joked.

Pepper just laughed at him, grabbing a piece of paper from her desk. She rolled it up, telling him to shoo as if he was her dog. However, he did comply and let her office with a smile on his face. Then, suddenly, it seemed as if the kid was everywhere he went. When he went to go check the intern labs, Peter was standing and looking at him with a clipboard in his hands. When he went to get some lunch, there he was on one of the cafeteria tables (was he even eating?). It was beginning to get a bit creepy.

Scratch that. Very creepy.

And when Pepper came out of her office later that day, her first instinct was to go and sit with Peter. Not her boyfriend, but the little devil child. And Peter knew that he saw. So, as Pepper and the kid walked down the hallway, he put an emphasis on his smile, or his laughter, and smugly looked over his shoulder. If he was the type of person to flip someone off, he would've been doing that too.

Tony decided that he'd never like Peter Parker. No matter what happened between them, and that would never, ever, change.

Or maybe, he'd like him a lot. Tony did always appreciate the people that stood up to him, even if it was clear they had some presumptive opinion alright set up. Well, he always did like to prove people wrong. Even if that person was a fourteen-year-old, conniving, intern.

Another person on the list of people Tony didn't like (it was a long list) was the new, and loved, Spider-man. The arachnid got underneath Tony's toes, taking the limelight from things the billionaire could've stopped first. It wasn't that he was bothered about press, it was just it almost seemed to happen whenever Tony actually made an effort to go out and patrol (he usually only helped whenever the Avengers assemble bell rang through the tower).

It was like the vigilante had tabs on him, knowing if he was out or not. It was very creepy and didn't help the bad name 'spiders' already got. Tony wished he could hit him with a broom, or something, and get him out of his business.

Peter Parker loved being Spider-man, it was one of the things that gave him a sense of euphoria. As much as the bite hurt, he wouldn't trade the feeling of saving people for anything (well, maybe he would. He'd definitely love to see Ben again).

He remembered the day it happened, vividly. He always would. The feeling of the sharp bite on his neck, imprinting his skin. It was tough and it stung for a whole week afterwards.

He had diverted from Oscorp's tour group, after they left him behind when he took a bathroom break. Somehow, unbeknownst to him, he got into the labs. He stared at the work, in awe, when the spider crawled up his arm and bit into his skin, changing his life forever.

Being a superhero was all he ever wanted, and he got the chance from that spider. So, when all these weird powers started to come out of nowhere, he decided that it was time for him to give back. He used his pocket money to get some red fabric, making his first suit.

Sneaking out became a habit. He'd open his window, crawl out of the fire escape, and spend all night fighting crime. When he'd return with bruises and blood all over his body, he tried his best to hide it from his family. But, they noticed. Eventually, they got curious. They'd ask him questions, making him feel all insecure and jittery. He didn't want them to find out as he knew they'd make him stop. So, he continued to lie.

And then... Ben. Ben died... all because of him. All his Uncle wanted to do was follow him, to make sure he was okay. When Peter turned into an alleyway to change, close to a convenience store, Ben assumed he went into the shop. That shop was the last building he ever entered and Peter was too late to stop the gunman.

Ben's death was on him and there is nothing he could ever do about it.

He needed an outlet. Pepper had hired him weeks before, but it wasn't enough. He continued as Spiderman, spending more and more time out on the streets. He knew it scared May and Pepper, but he just couldn't stop himself.

People started to notice a change in him at school, specifically his teachers and Ned. Nobody else cared too much. But when Peter accidentally ran a lap in the record time, he realised he needed to be more careful about showing his powers off. Couch Wilson seemed to be interested, however, begging him to join track. He refused, however, stating that it must've been a fluke and he really couldn't, especially with his debilitating asthma/back pain (back pain he had just made up, of course).

"Pete, that was so cool!" Ned whispered, as the class walked back to get changed. "I've never seen you run that quick, how did you even see where you were going without your glasses?"

Shit. That was another thing that had drastically changed. His eyesight was fixed over night. He really didn't know how to explain that one. Ned would call bullshit if he just said he wore contacts (his best friend knew how much he hated those tiny glass things).

"Pepper paid for..., uh, laser eye- correction. I don't need the glasses anymore," Peter, falsely, explained. Ned seemed to believe him, however, nodding as if they made complete sense.

Everyone crowded him as soon as he took a step into the changing room, all wanting to know if he was taking steroids or something. If he didn't feel scared, he'd laugh in their faces. Steroids for high school gym class sounded ridiculous. But, to be fair to his peers, he had just gone from not being able to walk without taking a deep breath to beating the track record... overnight. And, really, getting bit by a radioactive Spider was more ridiculous than steroids, after all.

Ned was still taking about it as they walked to their next class, actively grinning and showing how proud he was of his friend.

“Honestly, Pete! You should’ve seen Coach Wilson’s face when you zoomed past everyone else, it was incredible!” Ned said, recounting the story as if it was in one of his favourite TV shows.

“Thanks, Ned,” Peter replied, as they got to their lockers. He grabbed some books, closing the metal door. As he did, MJ’s face came out of nowhere.

“Shit!” Peter exclaimed, jumping back into Ned. He really needed to get a hold of the ‘spidey-sense’ power, or maybe it didn’t work as his friend wasn’t really a ‘threat’. Peter wasn’t too sure. He grimaced as his teacher gave him a look, a silent lecture about swearing being sent his way. “MJ, you scared me.”

“Cool,” was the response he got, as MJ narrowed her eyes at the teenager. “So, what was that about? You’ve never been able to do that before, Peter. You’ve been working out?”

“Working out? Uh, yeah, that’s it. Working out,” Peter told her, rubbing the back of his neck awkwardly. “Miss Potts has this new gym and, uh, got me a personal trainer.”

Ned’s eyes sparkled at the lie. “Woah. That’s so cool,” He said, “She’s awesome, Pete!”

“Sure,” MJ deadpanned, shaking her head. “I’m watching you, Peter Parker.”

Scary, Peter thought. She always had been. But as she walked away, he couldn’t help the feeling of... a crush(?) forming in his gut. But, then again, he really thought the new boy Johnny Storm was attractive. He had a choice to make, maybe. Maybe he didn’t have a chance with either of them.

“Scary,” Ned mumbled, as if he could tell what Peter was thinking. So, he really was included to agree.

It was late in the week, only days after he met Tony Stark, when Spider-man and Iron Man had their first, official, meeting. A lot of important meetings that week, Peter realised.

Peter had been in the area, on one of his many patrols, when he noticed a weird, big, rat emerge from the sewers. Not only was it creepy, or downright terrifying, the animal was also destroying buildings and people wherever it walked.

Using his webs, Peter got up to the commotion faster than anyone else in the area (not that many superheroes lived here, they just seemed to come out of nowhere whenever something was threatening the area). He managed to get the upper hand on the animal, as it used its massive claws to hit back.

Peter swung around, back and forth from one building to the other, as he tried to make sure the animal didn’t cause anything else to crumble. He made sure to keep an eye out for the people below, making sure no babies got squashed by the super-size rat that, frankly, smelt. That wouldn’t be a good way to go.

He saved a few people, shooting webs at other’s wounds to keep everything contained before they got to the hospital. And then, finally, he figured out what to do.

Webbing its feet together, just like he had seen in that Star Wars movie, he managed to collapse the rat. When he got it down, he noticed a vial around its neck with a suspicious powder in it. For some reason, he felt indebted to pour it over the rat. As he did, it shrank to its normal size and scurried

away.

Magic always had fascinated him. Before the whole superhero dream, Peter wanted to be a wizard. Maybe in another life.

As that happened, Peter looked up to see three Avengers staring down at him (Iron Man, Captain America and Hawkeye). He saluted to them, the eyes of the mask growing just a little.

He had always, always, been a huge fan of the superhero team. As much as he didn't like Tony.. he could admire his work as Iron Man. And, when they worked, his dream of being just like them would increase tenfold.

"Seems like you're a little late to the party," he said, thanking god for the voice modulator he installed days ago. "But, really? All this firepower for a little rat?"

Both the Captain and Hawkeye smirked at his comment, but Peter could tell the man in the armour felt a little irate. His faceplate lifted up, letting Peter see the scowl on his face. Peter laughed underneath his breath, admiring how little it took to get Tony Stark angry. He was becoming an expert at that.

"I see you've got it all sorted then," Tony murmured, as if someone was forcing him to say something nice. "I would say nice job, but look at all the damage you caused. If it was just a little rat, I think you could've done a better job here."

"Alright, shell-head," Peter laughed, "A bit salty? I think you wanted to get here first, didn't you?"

"Oh, he definitely did," Clint Barton explained, holding the bow (the one Tony made him, which meant Tony was offended when he took the Spider's side, traitor) to his chest. "Look at that face, he's so upset."

"Awwwh," Peter frowned, pretending to be upset for Tony. "Well, nice to chat with you. I'd chat more, but I have places to be. So, I should be going, shouldn't I?"

He was about to swing away when something stooped him. Peter groaned, as the pain from a hit rushed through his body. It came from his torso, Peter realised. He put a hand over the wound, applying some pressure onto it to help maintain some of the bleeding.

"Son, you okay?" Steve Rogers said, in that tone of voice that Peter thought was reserved for his school's PSA's. "Did you get hurt? Tony, has a medbay if you need it." Steve looked over at Tony, who shrugged. He'd rather not have the Spider-kid come back, but he wasn't evil.

"Mm fine, Captain America, sir," Peter said, a bit spooked from how deep his voice sounded (thank you voice modulator). "I'll just be on my way."

As Spider-man walked away, he looked over his shoulder and would've made eye contact with Tony, if it wasn't for the mask over his face. He seemed to be smug, as if he was saying 'I'm better than you', as he got to the stupid, big, rat first.

But, Tony could admit that he was a little concerned for the vigilante. He'd never admit it to someone's face, but it was there. There was a pool of blood on the suit, almost camouflaged into the material. But Tony could clearly see it, as the man's hand laid over the wound. He brushed it off after only a few seconds, flying back to the tower.

Something about him was familiar, but he just couldn't put his finger on it...



# The Competition

## Chapter Notes

Tw- minor character death

“Did you see last nights episode?” Ned Leeds asked his best friend, holding onto his backpack with one hand as they weaved between fellow students, all begrudgingly making their way into the school’s front doors.

Meeting Ned Leeds was, probably, in the top three best things that could’ve ever happened to Peter Parker.

Peter was a lonely kid, in all sense of the word. His parents died when he was four-years-old, ripping away a sense of security from him that, even at a young age, he never thought he’d lose. Most of the kid’s refused to share toys with him, as he was a lonely parent-less weirdo (as they’d remind him, everyday) who had just moved into town. Peter tried to tell them that Uncle Ben and Aunt May were his parents now, but, no, they didn’t seem to listen.

He’d sit in the corner of the playground, looking around the area. The sky always did look its best near noon, not too bright, but not too dim. He’d stare down at the grass and count the beetles as they scurried around in the dirt, all looking like they had somewhere to go. He’d make stories for them, pretending as if they were out to work and eventually returning to their children. His parents, however? They were never coming back, Peter soon realised.

Before Ned came into his life, this loneliness would only persist. And when the kids found out he was smart? The teasing only got worse. He’d answer a question, grinning from ear-to-ear as soon as he got confirmation he was right. But, even at the age of four, kids could be cruel. The room would erupt into snickering, each child pointing and laughing at the nerd Peter Parker, who pushed his parents away. And if he started to cry, that was only ammunition for them.

Uncle Ben would pick him up, holding him in his arms. He’d spin him around in the air, just like his dad used to do, and he’d wait for Peter to start giggling like he always did. But, there was nothing making him happy anymore. So, when Ben put him down, he asked his nephew if he was feeling good. The answer broke the police officer’s heart. His little Peter, the kid so pure that he’d sob if he accidentally stood on a snail, was being bullied. In that moment, he immediately found another school (although, more expensive) in another area.

That school was everything Peter had dreamt of, after losing his parents. It had comfort, a little corner in which the kid’s could read and play with another. The teacher’s were kind, comforting Peter’s every need. And the kids were a lot nicer, welcoming Peter as if he had been there all along.

Welcoming a new kid wasn’t the same as becoming friends with them, however. During his second day at this new school, he found himself alone (once again) on a patch of grass. Just as he was about to get acquainted with the new wildlife, a young boy walked up to him with a toy spaceship in his hands. His eyes were wide, his hands gripping the toy with utter strength (for a five-year-old, anyway).

And he asked to be Peter's friend, sharing the same massive smile when Peter said yes. They sat and played with the spaceship all of recess, finding out they both preferred maths to english lessons. Everything Peter liked, Ned did too. As if their friendship was written in the stars, the two best friends already had plans for a play date (they just had to get their guardians to agree).

Ned never cared that Peter's parents weren't around. Weirdly enough, he was the only person who acted like it was normal. Peter never understood why they'd mock him for it, but hearing Ned ask for his guardians (as the teacher had told them to say when he joined) gave him a huge wave of relief, even if he didn't realise it at the time. And he never slipped up. He never, ever, asked Peter if his parents were okay with him coming over, or if his parents could drive them to the park. He knew that it would upset him, so he figured it was obvious not to say the word. He was just... Peter's best friend forever.

Uncle Ben and Aunt May loved Ned and Ned's parents adored Peter. Since the day they met in that playground, there had never been a week when the boys didn't have a sleepover. In fact, the Leed's even decorated their spare room with Peter's design choices. That was Peter's bedroom, even if he usually slept in Ned's room. It was just nice to know they cared. The Parker's didn't have a spare room, but they upgraded their kid's bed to a bunkbed (they were sick of the air mattress).

As well as support from Pepper Potts when Ben died, May easily leant on the shoulders of Ned's parents. Ned was a huge comfort to her Pete, just letting him sit there and think. Ned's hugs were always the best, especially when there was bad news (which there always was, Peter had a bad case of 'Parker luck'). He held Peter as the, now teenager, cried. He was the first one that Peter cried to, not believing that his Uncle was dead. Ned tried his best to help him, but he became an empty shell of himself (which Peter was still trying to come back from). But, even if the rest of their friendship was covered by a huge, dark, grey cloud of anxiety and depression, Ned would always be there to support Peter Parker.

Peter was always protective of Ned, whenever someone said something horrible to him, he'd feel like he should punch them (even before the bite). They didn't talk to a lot of other people, but neither of them would want to change that, because why would they ever want it another way? So, he tried his best to still continue to do that even whilst he mourned his Uncle (it was like losing his dad all over again).

The Leed's family made dinner for the two remaining Parker's, offering to take Peter in for a night, so that May could properly grieve. They took them out for dinner, helped clean the apartment and they'd go grocery shopping for them, whenever May felt like she couldn't function anymore. They just went above and beyond for them, displaying true friendship as they did. When May Parker collapsed onto the floor, from grief, at Ben's funeral, Ned's mother was the one who caught her.

"Peter?" A voice said, pulling Peter out from the abyss which was his memory. He blinked a few times, noticing how his best friend looked at him with a curious look on his face. He shook Peter's shoulder for a second, getting more and more worried (Peter knew all of his mannerisms and this was one was definitely nervousness). "Hey, Pete?"

"Yeah?" Peter finally replied, covering his mouth as he let out a fake cough to fill the awkward silence. He tried to play it out as if he was distracted by Liz, but it didn't work on Ned.

He never was good at lying, except for the biggest secret of his life. Nobody, at all, knew who was behind the mask. He was definitely proud of himself for keeping that a secret, it would be awful if that got out.

"Definitely not," Ned chuckled, confirming his hypothesis (in which, Ned would call his bluff) as

he did. "If you were staring, it would've been Johnny or MJ, the crush of Liz was so last year," Ned added a little eye roll, grabbing one of his notebooks from his locker as they walked past it. "Anyway, I asked if you watched last night's episode."

There was something bothering Peter. He answered Ned's question, which was a no, and told him he had to do something quickly before homeroom. He turned towards the school's doors and jumped out of them. His senses were going haywire, trying to warn him that something was about to happen.

Right as Peter moved, a black car revved its engine. He stared at the man in the car, who's face was obscured by a black mask. He stared at Peter, for about a minute, and used a radio to, presumably, call some other people in. Perhaps there was a threat to the school, that they hadn't warned the kids about from fear of panic. Whatever, or whoever, it was had been driving across the same street Peter and Ned walked to school on. Hopefully, it was all just a coincidence.

He checked his watch, rushing back to the class in record timing when he realised the day started soon. He jumped into his seat next to Ned, making it in time by five seconds. He smiled to himself as he did, giving Ned a quick high five.

Whatever it was, it was already out of his mind by second period.

In the last period of the school day, the class walked into find a new teacher stood at the front of the classroom. His hair was shaved and he had impeccable fashion sense, dressed from head to toe in a smart suit that just oozed money. It might as well of said "I am rich," on the back of the blazer.

It was History class, one that Peter was getting A's in, so he felt as if he should listen (as much as he'd normally do). He wasn't sure where their last teacher was, but something about the whole thing was weird. Peter shrugged it off (although, he swore he could hear something weird coming from the cupboard, which had been blocked off by a table).

The class felt relatively normal, but Peter noticed the same radio from the car that morning in the man's pocket, when he turned to the left. Something wasn't right here and Peter could tell, but he didn't have a clue what that was. Without proof, he couldn't exactly say something. He didn't want to look paranoid.

Their teacher kept hovering around Peter's desk, as soon as he set the task for the day. Peter tried to keep his eye contact on Ned, but it was hard when the man (Mr Smith?) was glancing over his shoulder every three minutes. Peter could feel it, the gaze burning into the back of his head.

Mr Smith didn't pay any attention to the other kids in the class. Peter figured he was overreacting, but it looked like Ned was thinking the same thing he did. His hand slipped past Peter's neck at one point, touching the skin and making him flinch out of his seat. He needed to get out, he needed to-

That period, the bell was his saving grace. The bell was so loud, it always was, and the sound bounced throughout the room and made Peter take a breath that he didn't even know that he was holding. He got up, grabbing his bag as soon as possible. When Mr Smith dismissed them, his feet took him out of the room almost automatically.

Ned caught up to him as he was walked around the corner. Peter's chest was moving up and down, trying not to focus on the high school's corridor that was heaving with other children. Ned's hand rested on his shoulder, helping him ground himself. "Ned," he managed to whisper, looking at him with wild, begging, eyes.

"What's wrong?" Ned questioned, using his hand to gently rub back and forth onto Peter's

shoulder. “Pete? You’re scaring me here, man.”

“Sorry, uh, it’s nothing,” Peter shook his head, trying to compose himself. He took a deep breath, “Just, uh, didn’t Mr Smith freak you out a little?”

“Sorta,” Ned replied, looking over his shoulder to properly ensure the man wasn’t still staring at Peter. “He was a little freaky, wasn’t he?” He tried to laugh a little, relaxing when he got a bit of a chuckle out of Peter’s mouth.

They walked out of that school only moments later, neither of them noticing the presence of anybody else. Ned made sure Peter got to his apartment, watching him enter his door before he left. He took the short(ish) path to his own house, not looking back to see a figure of red jumping out of his best friend’s window, swinging between the buildings and saving the day.

The day after, it was one of Peter’s internship days. He walked over to the subway, eventually getting into the Stark Industries building with his pass (one of the highest security access from any of the employees). He immediately walked up to Pepper’s office, wanting to say hello. As he did, Tony Stark walked around the corner and, almost, right into Peter.

“Mr Stark,” Peter said, with a bit of anger behind his words. He looked up at the man, who’s facial expression probably matched Peter’s. “Hello.”

“You know, Pete. I never used to believe in the man upstairs, but now I know that the devil does exist, so he must too,” Tony remarked, a slight smirk playing at his lips. Peter could tell it was sort of a joke, but he didn’t care. He knew how to play this game.

“Yeah? Finally looking in the mirror will do that for you, Mr Stark,” Peter said, “Because I don’t know about you, but Miss Potts seems to think that I’m her guardian angel.”

“She’s deluded,” Tony said, “Because-,”

Peter interrupted the man (and Peter figured the man wasn’t used to that, if his shocked face was anything to do with it), “Oh, should I tell her you said that? Because I think she’s coming around the corner...” Peter put his finger up, silently counting, “Right now.”

“You are an evil child, Peter Parker,” Tony glared, noticing immediately how they both plastered a forced smile on their faces when Pepper came up to them.

When Pepper’s arm went around Peter first, his smile became real. He was a smug, tiny, mastermind, in Tony’s opinion. They had a sort of competition between them, over who could get Pepper’s attention.

“It’s nice to see you two talking,” Pepper smiled, oblivious to the fact of the growing tension between the two people. “Tony, I have to steal this little one now, we’ve got some important work to do.”

“Oh, that’s such a shame. Mr Stark and I were getting along so well,” Peter gave Tony a fake pout, shrugging his shoulders, “We’ll just have to catch up later, won’t we?”

“I can’t wait,” Tony said with gritted teeth, watching Peter leave (he always looked so smug, the idiot). He waved to Pepper, an anger bubbling in his stomach when Peter waved back, smiling widely at him.

Pepper assigned Peter some tasks, giving him a hug as she did. She walked back to her office, letting Peter have full reign of the tower. He walked around, did some jobs, and felt... bored (after

he finished everything in record time).

He took the corner, close to the intern labs. The interns, mostly, were down for lunch, so Peter figured he could get in without anyone asking any questions. He stepped inside, an overwhelming feeling of excitement coming over him. Computers, plans, robots and everything someone like him (a nerd, Ned would say) would enjoy, were all there. He looked at everything, not sure what to do first.

He walked towards the whiteboard in the front of the room, reading all the calculations. He noticed that some of the data was wrong, so he figured he could help out. He picked up the nearest pen, changing it.

Unbeknownst to Peter Parker, Tony Stark also took the same corner at the same time. He came up to ask one of interns a question, but was about to turn around and leave when he noticed they weren't there. But, the kid caught his eye. He looked through the glass pane doors and watched him walk around the room with wonder in his eyes.

When Peter fixed the results, Tony took that down to a fluke. There was no way that his mortal enemy (Tony was nothing, if he wasn't dramatic) was a little genius. If he was, that meant Pepper loved a little him, and, really, that would be the biggest betrayal, if Tony was someone who held grudges (he was).

But, moments later, Tony finally figured that, no, this definitely wasn't a fluke. Somehow, in only a few moments, Peter configured a little robot. He watched for a little longer, before turning on his feet with a grimace on his face.

Brilliant. The devil, or little Peter Parker, just had to be just like him, a man who loved science and engineering and making things. It made Tony feel weird, because he could recognise the talent in this kid, but it also meant he had to compliment the boy (the boy who annoyed him, more than any teen ever had before).

Tony walked through his building's hallways, his destination set on finding his partner. He said hello to a few of the different employees, not stopping to say much as he had a plan in action. He got to Pepper's office, propping his head through the slightly open door. When she saw him, she rolled her eyes.

Tony usually spent most of his hours down in his lab, far away from any human interactions. At times he'd got to the Avenger's floor, speaking to them on a whim. Whenever he had something to rant about, or if he just missed her, he'd end up in the open seat of Pepper's office.

However, ever since his first meeting with Peter, he had spent a lot more time downstairs amongst the interns. He knew Peter had an agenda, and he wasn't going to let him win. Pepper was his, for a lot longer than Peter knew her, and he was going to prove that to the teenager.

So, whenever he found himself in Pepper's office now, the woman had to listen to him ranting about what did Peter did now.

Peter, however, had a different plan to worm himself into being first in Pepper's good books. He never spoke ill of 'Mr Stark', he avoided the topic all together. If she asked, he'd make something up and pretend they got along. He knew too much about her, and he was definitely going to be a victor of their unspoken competition. Tony didn't know what the storm which was brewing.

"What's happened now? Tell me all about how my teenage intern is ruining your life," Pepper said, leaning back into her chair. She put the pen she was using down, looking up at Tony with a tired

look on her face.

"You never told me that the evil incarnate was a genius?" Tony questioned, jumping down into the familiar chair he had spent most of the last few days in. "If I knew that, it would've all made sense. No way some kid without a big brain could've gotten the best of me, Miss Potts."

Pepper looked at him for a second, letting that sweet smile fall on her face after a small moment of confusion. "You like him, don't you?" She asked him, a wave of excitement clear in how he spoke. Pepper looked into his eyes, as if she knew exactly what he was thinking about. "I knew you would, you two are exactly alike."

"Take that back, my love," Tony scowled, shaking his head with a fake gasp. He swirled around in the chair, glancing through the window to make sure the evil child wasn't peeking through the curtains to sneak in on their conversation. Turning around, he made sure to enunciate the annoyance in his voice, "I do not like that heathen, I can just appreciate a clever mind."

Pepper suddenly deflated, her smile dropping into a look of disappointment. That hurt more than the frown, he realised. And if Peter was actually snooping through the door, that would be the moment that he knew he'd won.

"Tony," She sighed, putting one hand through her hair as she tried to figure out why her boyfriend hated her little angel. "He's just a kid, darling. I don't understand why you hate him so much."

"Pepper," Tony said, standing up from the chair he was in. He walked over to the door, making eye contact with Peter. He was stood across the room with a smirk on his face. Tony patted his jacket down, searching for a hidden bug that the boy might've placed in the blazer. Peter built a robot in only ten minutes, max, so he wouldn't put it past him to listen into Tony's every thought. "He's not an angel! He's everywhere, Pep! That child is plotting against me, for some reason, and I can't figure it all out. Look! He's staring at us!" He pointed outside to where the child was stood, telling Pepper to check. When she got up to check, nobody was stood there at all.

"When was the last time you slept?" Pepper asked, gently, putting a gentle hand on Tony's upper back (gently rubbing, trying to console her). "Honey... I think you're acting a little, uh, delusional."

Tony glanced to her, his mouth slightly open in shock. He couldn't figure out where Peter had run to, and how he did it so fast. The shock was so great, that he didn't hear what his partner was asking of him. He turned to Pepper, as her hands gripped his shoulders, and tried to shake the surprise away from him. He blinked a few times, starting to believe that maybe he was just tired.

"Tony?"

"You know, uh," Tony started, "Maybe I do need to sleep, huh?" He turned away from her, taking a breath as he did. "Don't wait up for me, love, I'll be down with the bots, or, uh, maybe I'll get Steve to put me to sleep then."

"I love you," Pepper said, putting her hand through his messy hair, to calm him down (hopefully), "You know that Pete's like a son to me, but you are my boyfriend. My love for you is equal, honey, there's no competition at all. If I was mean, I'd tell the press that Tony Stark was jealous of a sweet, little, boy. But, I'm not."

Tony chuckled to himself, leaning forward to press a kiss onto Pepper's soft lips. He leant back, a lovesick smile on his face. "Yeah, I know. Love you too. Still doesn't mean that he isn't a menace, you know."

“Oh, I know,” Pepper said, mocking him. “Such a menace.”

“You mock me, but you’ll see when he takes over our company,” Tony called, as he left the office. He smiled at her as he closed the door, remembering the feel of her lips on his. She was the best person for him...she always had been.

He walked with a spring in his step as he made his way up to the Avenger’s floor. Before he stepped into the elevator, he felt the presence of someone small stood next to him (evil, maybe). When he glanced down, Peter Parker was staring up at him. He jumped, clasping a hand over his heart. “Shit!”

“Oh, hello, Mr Stark. Fancy seeing you here, huh,” Peter commented, his hands in his pockets. “Uh, even though I didn’t want to do this... I know you saw me in the labs and I just wanted to apologise. I know I didn’t have permission to use them.. I just got excited.”

Tony recoiled in shock, “Why, Mr Parker, is that the first nice thing that you’ve said to me? I’m honoured,” He grinned, looking at how Peter’s apologetic face morphed into frustration. “If I was an evil man, I’d spread this whole thing out. You know what? People do call me evil, you know, so... tell me, how sorry are you?”

“This is why I don’t like you,” Peter grumbled, crossing his arms, “I take my back my apology. All of it.”

Tony laughed, “Come on, I like to hear it. It’s music to my ears, kiddo. In fact,” Tony took his phone out of his pocket and brought out his camera. Putting the lens down to the carpet, he started recording. “Go on, tell me. I want to have a voice recording of it. Should we even make it my ringtone?”

“Right, okay,” Peter rolled his eyes, but Tony could see a little laugh coming out of his mouth. “I’m leaving now. I don’t want to talk to you, don’t even know why I tried.” He turned around, leaving Tony alone by the elevator doors.

“Hey, kid?” Tony called, waiting for the boy to turn around. When he did, Tony offered him a small, maybe fake, smile. “Use the lab whenever you want.”

Peter stopped, a small smile growing on his face. He nodded a few times, a thankful look on his face. Maybe Tony wasn’t so bad, if he really thought about it.

“Only because Pepper would kill me if I didn’t let you,” Tony added, “Don’t think I’ve started to like you, Mr Parker.”

He always did have to ruin everything, didn’t he? Peter rolled his eyes (Tony realised he always looked like Pepper when he did that), grumbling something under his breath.

“Same to you, Mr Stark,” Peter called, after whatever he said before, running around the corner to excitedly go and use the labs to build something.

Tony watched Peter run off, with a feeling of annoyance and.. amusement (?) playing in his mind. He shook his head for a moment, turning into the lift to go and annoy his teammates.

He definitely didn’t think about how Peter Parker could actually be the angel everyone described him to be, because that wasn’t the truth. Tony knew what the kid was playing at, and he wasn’t going to let him do it to him.

In the next few days, Peter and Tony’s squabbling did slow down. But, of course. That never did

last forever, did it? Their healthy (Tony and Peter said it was healthy, but Pepper said she would ‘agree’ to ‘disagree’) competition was back on track, both of them arguing with the other every single time they walked into each other. Tony continued to complain to Pepper, and Peter even started to say things to her as well. Pepper, however, spent most of her time ranting to May about it all, who’d talk to Peter about it. Really, it was an entire circle.

Pepper mocked Tony’s hatred for Peter, telling him that he only pretended to hate the teen. He was scared that the kid was so likeable, and turned that fear into arguments. Tony definitely disagreed with that. He wasn’t scared. He just knew it.

On one stressful day, Peter decided to go out as Spider-man as soon as he left the tower. He swung around, venting his frustrations through helping animals out of trees (luckily for the city, it wasn’t a very busy day for crime. Unluckily, however, for a vigilante who needed to get his anger out).

When the sky turned dark, he realised it was about time he walked home. He climbed up the building to his bedroom, stepping into the bedroom. He climbed across his ceiling, after making sure that the door closed. With a deep sigh of relief, he jumped down and landed on the floor.

Then, suddenly, he heard a crash behind him. As a wave of legos fell to his feet, he looked up and down at his best friend who was sat on the bottom of his bunk-bed with an utterly shocked look on his face. Peter completely forgot that his friend was coming over that day. It had slipped his mind when Tony said something to him, making him angry.

“Oh, crap,” Peter mumbled, before Ned had a chance to say anything.

“You’re- uh, you’re- Spider-man? The one from YouTube? No. Way!” Ned said, his voice a high pitch and wild, in complete shock that his best friend, his Pete, was a superhero!

The first thing that came to Ned’s head, when he let himself think about this huge identity reveal, was why he didn’t know about it? He always told Peter everything, from his school projects down to the deepest feelings he held in his head. So, for Peter to not tell him something this big, it did sting just a little bit. But, he was sure that he’d have a good reason for it.

Peter could almost see the cogs turning in Ned’s head, from the way he stared at him with a blank look. “Look, I didn’t tell you as I was scared. If people know about my identity then you, May, and everyone I love will be in danger!”

Ned nodded, trying to process what Peter had just said. He took a few moments to compose himself, understanding the gravity of the situation. “Okay, okay, I get it, Pete. I won’t tell anyone, but I just- wow, okay? This is crazy, Pete! Does Miss Potts know? Oh my god! Does Mr Stark know?”

“Mr Stark?” Peter said, trying to get Ned to be quiet as he did. “Uh, no! Of course he doesn’t, why would I want him to know? Nobody knows, Ned! Nobody at all. Please, just-,”

“Why do you not want Mr Stark to know? He’s Iron Man!” Ned said, in disbelief that Peter seemed to hate one of the most famous people on earth. When Peter looked at him, desperately, he let it go.

A few minutes of silence passed before either of them said anything else. “So, uh, can you summon an army of Spiders?”

Peter was now sat on the bottom bed, next to Ned, with his suit scrunched up in his lap. He was now dressed in his pyjamas, stress evident from how he didn’t look Ned in the eye.

“Ned,” Peter laughed, shaking his head. His voice did shake as he spoke, in disbelief from how his secret got out. “No, of course not.”

“Oh.”

Another minute, or so, passed.

“Can I be your guy in the chair?” Ned asked.

“My what?” Peter said, turning his head to him.

“You know... Kim Possible? I’ll be Wade. The person behind the screen. I’d be like a secret agent, Pete. Tap a camera into the suit and I’d help you out on patrols. We could be a team,” Ned told his friend, shrugging slightly. He explained the term as if it was obvious and that Peter should know who he was on about.

“Uh, sure?” Peter laughed, “You can be my guy in the chair, Ned. As long as you don’t pass out if you see a bit of blood. Criminals don’t care about punching Spider-man in the face.”

“It was one time, Peter!” Ned groaned.

So, they made it happen. The next time Peter went out as Spider-man, only one day later, he had Ned’s voice in his ear.

He swung down the street, as Ned enthusiastically told him all about the nearest crimes happening in their area.

Ned’s voice went silent for a second, the microphone cutting out. Peter looked to his side, to see a van parked up on the curb. He squinted, staring down at the antenna on top of the vehicle. He had a feeling that something was interfering with the microphone in the mask, freaking Peter out.

He stood on the pavement, waiting to see if someone inside made a move. And, as he moved down the path, the van did too. Something inside Peter told him that he’d only have once chance to move, so he quickly shot a web to the closest building and got out of there as soon as he could.

When Ned finally reconnected, Peter was sat on top of a building. Ned was saying something, but Peter was too scared to say anything about it. He waited for him to mention a crime and only replied when he did.

And when he was in a random alleyway, punching a robber in the face, he couldn’t even remember what had happened in the beginning of the patrol.

And as he got back to his apartment, the same van was parked outside. Peter, however, didn’t have a clue.

## Reluctantly Getting Close

### Chapter Notes

tw- small mention of self harm tendencies,

Peter Parker was sat in the one class he didn't share with his best friend, trying to focus on the screen in front of him as Flash threw balls of papers at the back of his head.

Flash always had it out for Peter. He had no idea why, but as soon as they both took steps into Midtown Tech's school halls, the other kid decided Peter was the reason for all of his problems.

It never got too physical. He'd occasionally get a small shove, but Flash never punched him or anything like that. If he did, Peter wasn't too sure if he'd be able to hold back. After going out as Spider-man, people would hit him every night. So, whenever he knew someone was trying to hurt him, his senses could work on auto-pilot. He knew that if puny Parker hit Flash, the whole school would know something had changed within him.

Peter ignored his taunting every single day. The 'bullying' conferences, in which Midtown made every child attend, told him that the bullies would stop if you didn't react. Peter wanted to tell them that it wasn't true, but he always kept his mouth shut. Always.

Flash's father was, somewhat, important in the political scene. Peter only knew that, because his fellow student liked to remind everyone that he was more important than them.

He glanced back at Flash, getting a piece of paper straight to his face as he did. He groaned, his cheeks flushing red as Flash and his friends started to laugh.

Peter hadn't known who Flash was before high school, as he had attended a private middle school that Peter had never heard of. But, for some reason, Flash took one look at Peter and decided he hated him.

Peter wasn't sure why it happened. When he ranted to Pepper once, too scared to tell May, she had told him that bullies tend to hone in on the people that they are jealous of. Peter wasn't too sure if that was true. If so, what did he have to be jealous of? Flash had both of his parents, a huge house with bodyguards and chefs and a bunch of friends at his beck and call. Peter? He was a scrawny orphan, who's Aunt and Uncle had to take him in as they were the only family he had left. He lived in an apartment barely big enough to hold them all in, as they lived from pay-check to pay-check. If Flash wanted to swap places, Peter was sure that he'd say yes.

But when Peter became Spider-man, he stopped seeing the world in rose-tinted glasses. He knew it wasn't all butterflies and rainbows, from the loss of his parents, but he still wasn't fully aware of the brighter picture. Going out and fighting criminals, Peter was able to recognise the fear in Flash's face, or how he'd flinch whenever someone raised their hand too quickly.

It was these signs that made Peter think it through. Although Flash looked like he lived a lavish life, he wasn't lucky. He might have material things, but he didn't have love. It wasn't fair that he took it out on Peter, but the vigilante had people to lean back on. Flash, however, had no-one.

Peter remembered that he had tried to talk about it to Flash, just once. And that was the first moment the other teenager tried to hit him. Peter, using his senses, was able to dodge the fist. He watched Flash run away from him, regret etched into his face (from the way he grimaced at his own hand, Peter could recognise the guilt from a mile away).

Back in the classroom, Peter turned back around and felt a hand onto his arm. He looked up, only using his eyes (he felt as if he didn't have the energy to fully turn his head), to see Johnny Storm looking back at him with a slanted, worried, face.

Johnny Storm was taller than Peter, standing above most of the men in his school. His hair was blonde, perhaps closer to a yellow. His hair, whatever colour it was, was always messy, but it never looked bad. His blue eyes were hypnotic, always making Peter want to look into them for hours. Maybe he did have a crush on the boy.... but, he wasn't sure if he was gay, bi or pan (something else, maybe). He wasn't sure what he labelled himself as. For now, however, he'd just leave the labels and focus on the fact that Johnny Storm was very, very, attractive.

He was new(ish) to their school, joining only a few months ago. He didn't have much to catch up on, however, as most of the students were 'new', considering they were only in their freshman year. Johnny was immediately popular, waltzing in the front doors as if he knew how good he looked. Peter almost drooled at the sight, when Johnny winked at a few girls who were stood next to him (Ned said it was at him, but he definitely didn't believe that).

Johnny was on top of the 'social ladder'. Although their school was filled with nerds, as it was a STEM school, there was still jocks, nerds, and everything in between. Johnny was arrogant, but he had every right to be. He was smart, kind, pretty and one of the most athletic people on the sport's team. He heard Coach Wilson sing his praises once, after they did some wrestling.

Peter had a clear memory of the day the class trialed some wrestling. He was sat with Ned, far away from the rest of the crowds. They were all told to pair up with someone, so Peter immediately went for Ned. Ned, by then, knew about his powers (it wasn't that long ago), so he could make sure his friend didn't catch him off guard. He didn't want to inadvertently hurt someone.

Johnny was crowded by loads of different students, all of them begging him to be their partner. Johnny ignored most of them, making a bee-line to Peter. Peter's face dropped, terrified that this was some big prank that the whole year would laugh at for years to come. He prepared himself, waiting for a remark, but all Johnny did was ask Peter to be his partner. He was so sure he'd say yes, that his hand was already extended for Peter to take.

And Peter had wanted to say yes, badly. Meaning no offence to his best friend, but Johnny was the biggest hunk and he'd be stupid to say no to an opportunity like this. But, once again, he couldn't bare to hurt anyone (or for anyone to find out he liked boys. He didn't want to give them more reasons to tease him). So, he chickened out. He glanced at Ned, telling Johnny he had already partnered up.

Johnny's smile faltered into a frown, yet it was quickly replaced with that charismatic smile he gave everyone. He said that was fine, pairing up with another jock called 'Ben'. Peter wasn't jealous, he definitely wasn't.

He knew Johnny had been watching him, because later in the day he cornered Peter in the changing room. When nobody was looking, he put his hand on Peter's back and said something about 'good form'. He couldn't remember the exact words, as he was far too focused on the hand that was on him.

Ned said it was obvious that the jock liked him, but he didn't agree. He was just flirty with

everyone. That was his thing. And why he would ever like Peter? Nobody did. Not like that, anyway.

And, right now, Johnny's hand had slipped down from Peter's arm to his own hand. He squeezed it, making Peter look up more. He tried to hide how his cheeks turned an even deeper red than before, but he wasn't sure if it worked.

"You okay?" Johnny whispered to him, leaning slightly over to Peter's desk (and, yes, Peter was very happy that Johnny sat next to him).

Peter nodded, not trusting his own words. When Johnny's hand didn't move from his, his heart started to beat just a little faster. He couldn't tear his face away from Johnny's, the teacher's words becoming a blur.

"Yeah, I, um, I'm good. So good," Peter whispered back. When he spoke, Johnny's hand slipped away from his. He immediately missed the heat, turning his head back to the front of the room. He knew Johnny was still looking at him, but he was too nervous to look back again.

The other reason why Peter couldn't focus, par the paper that kept hitting his head, was the pool of pain in his torso. The night before this school day, Peter went out patrolling without Ned (for the first time since the identity reveal), and ended up getting hit hard during a fight. He remembered feeling dizzy, struggling to keep up with himself to win the fight. He did, just not before the man hit him hard enough to send him spiralling into the wall, creating a gash in his skin.

Peter managed to stitch the wound up, thanking higher powers for his super healing. But, it still managed to remain a huge source of pain. And, right now, he felt as if he was going to pass out.

The school bell rang, as an indication for the next lesson. Peter, however, refused to move. He knew that if he did, he'd probably just end up falling to the floor.

Most of the class had left, some of them still packing up, when the teacher realised he wasn't moving. Johnny was still there, although he had already packed everything up. Peter did not have the strength to realise.

"Peter? Did you hear the bell? It's next lesson," She said. She didn't seem amused that he wasn't moving, glancing to the door where the next class' students were already gathering.

"Right," Peter nodded. He tried to move. When he finally got to his feet, the whole room felt wavy. For a moment, Peter thought he was on a ship (or something like it). The wobble of the imaginary vessel, as it went across heavy waters, caused him to move side to side. His face must've been green, because Peter could see (although, not clearly) Johnny's concerned face. His friend's hand was back on his arm, trying to ground him. But he couldn't control it. He took one look at the man beside him, falling straight to the ground with a bang.

All he could remember from the moment was Johnny's voice calling out for him, then... nothing. His vision went black, his whole body numb. For a moment, Peter thought he'd never wake up again. He thought that, perhaps, this was the afterlife. That his final moments were in the middle of a high school classroom, far away from the people he loved. He knew it was just his future to die young, it had been for all the Parker family. It was his time now... he'd finally see his parents and Ben again. But, this wasn't it. This wasn't how Spider-man passed. He had to get up.

When his vision first came back to him, someone familiar was looking down at him. It wasn't Johnny, because the fair was far too dark. He blinked a few times, his mind trying to catch up with his eyesight.

When he finally figured out who the man was, he couldn't believe it.

"Mr S-Stark?" He mumbled. He looked around, seeing a bunch of kids grouped at the door. All of them were staring at him, or mostly looking at Tony (most of them in disbelief that Tony Stark was in their school). No-one else was in the room with them, par his teacher and the school nurse.

Tony cheered, commanding all the attention from near-by people with his big mouth. Peter winced, the noise hurting his head. When Tony announced that he was 'finally awake', (and then 'welcome back to the land of the living, said directly to him) he started to wonder how long he had been out. He wondered if there had ever been a day when Tony Stark was quiet.

"That's the name, Petey-Pie, don't wear it out," Tony said, winking at the teenager through the slip of skin showing from his sunglasses. "Heard you fainted, kiddo."

Peter grumbled, trying to sit up. The school nurse helped him up, making sure she supported his head. Putting an ice pack over his forehead, the woman didn't look like she wanted to be here. "Why are you here?" Peter asked, staring at Tony's face.

Tony faked an offended gasp, shaking his head. He laughed to himself for a second, before replying. "What, no thank you? We're going to have to work on your manners, Petey. I didn't have to take time out of my, frankly, busy day to come and get a little child who fainted."

Peter sighed, putting a hand over the wound that was just getting worse. He winced, feeling a burn through him. Tony, for a second, looked just a little concerned, but that quickly faded.

"To answer your question, Parker," Tony continued, his voice draining on and on through Peter's ears. Peter listened, although his frustration just kept growing. "They called Auntie May, obviously (well that's what Pep said, anyway), and she couldn't get here. Something about having a job. Then, they tried to get into contact with your second emergency contact. Did you know that's Pepper? Well, I didn't. Apparently it is. Anyway, she volunteered myself for the opportunity. Don't ask me why, because I'm about to tell you. She had a board meeting, to which I was supposed to be in, and was far too busy. I, tinkering away down in the lab, was then forced to come and get you."

"Fascinating," Peter grumbled, blinking a few times. He let his eyes close, for the second time that day, and tried to ignore all the pain his body felt. "But, I'm fine. So, there. You can leave. Thanks for coming."

Tony glanced over at the nurse, shrugged at her, and quickly returned his gaze towards Peter. He clicked in tongue in disapproval, shaking his head gently. "Afraid not, little child. Turns out that fainting children are not usually 'fine', so we're going to have to take you back. If I don't, Pepper is really going to kill me. I don't know about you, Petey, but I don't want to die by my lover's hands."

Peter looked to the door, making eye-contact with Johnny. Tony noticed the movement, raising an eye at the slight 'moment' the teens had. He decided to keep quiet, slipping his sunglasses into the front pocket of his fitted blazer. He turned back to Peter, making sure the kid looked in his eyes. He put his finger up, asking him to follow it. Tony laughed, more than he had in a while, when the kid smacked it away.

"Stop it! I'm not concussed!" Peter said, frowning. When Tony laughed at what he did, he couldn't help his lips curling up into a smile (as much as he wanted to be angry). When Tony tilted his head, as if to ask if he was sure.

“I think you are,” Tony said, wiggling his eyebrows as if he knew how annoying he was.

“I’m not!” Peter replied, sure of himself.

“Are.” Tony said in return, (Peter wanted to remark on how ‘eloquent’ he was, but he didn’t have the time or the patience).

“Not.”

“Are.”

“Not.”

When the nurse and teacher looked between them, clearly confused and frustrated, they both decided that maybe they’d just stop. They sat there awkwardly, until the teacher said something in Tony’s ear.

“Sure, kiddo,” Tony mumbled about their argument (and he always did have to have the last word), texting Happy to meet him outside the school. The kid would need some assistance walking, and he wasn’t about to do it himself.

Tony, although reluctantly, helped Peter walk to the front doors (just waiting for the moment where he could pass the kid over to Happy). Tony’s arm was around Peter’s shoulders, letting the kid lean on him. Neither of them said anything to the other, focusing on getting out of the doors. Tony, of course, acted unbothered as he signed Peter out, but Peter could tell that something was going on in his head.

As they stepped aside, Peter shrugged Tony’s arm away from him. He tried to take a few steps, but his legs lost their feeling. He fell, his knees bending and his body falling dangerously down to the sidewalk. If the billionaire didn’t catch him, Peter would’ve probably cracked his head open on the concrete.

“Stop being so stubborn,” Tony said, putting his arm back where it was before. He made eye contact with Happy, but didn’t pass the teenager over. Instead, he decided to keep hold of him as they walked towards the parked vehicle.

Peter didn’t say anything, just focusing on getting over where Happy had parked. When Happy opened the back door, he pulled himself away from Tony (for the second time that day), getting into the backseat. He leant against the back seats, taking a deep breath. Digging his nails into his skin, he tried not to throw up in the back of Tony’s, very expensive, car.

“Uh, huh,” Tony mumbled, taking Peter’s hand away from himself. “Don’t do that.”

“Why do you care?” Peter said, trying to get his hand away from Tony. He could easily do it, thanks to his super strength, but he didn’t want to alert Tony about his alter ego. If anyone could find out about him, it would definitely be Tony. He didn’t want that to happen.

Tony took his hand away, shutting the door. Peter thought he was in the clear, picking some skin. He needed a way to distract himself from the harsh pain in his stomach and this was the best way. But, suddenly, Tony opened the adjacent door and climbed into the backseat with Peter. He thrust a brown paper bag into the teenager’s lap, making sure to remind that he’d be cleaning up any vomit from the leather material. He definitely didn’t make sure Peter was safe, either. Because he didn’t care. He definitely didn’t.

“I don’t care,” Tony said, making a noise to tell Happy to start driving. He glanced over at Peter,

“But Pepper does. So, voila. Here we are.”

Peter nodded, resting his head against the car window. He put his hands in lap, just letting himself think about what his day had been like. He remembered something Ben had said to him once. ‘Peter, manners cost nothing’. He was pretty sure every parent said that to their kid once, because it wasn’t anything ground breaking. But when he was just a kid, he thought it was. He tried to honour Ben in everything he did, so he decided he needed to be the ‘bigger person’.

“Thank you, Mr Stark,” Peter said, barely audible. “I, uh, it was nice of you to come and pick me up. Busy and all.”

He was certain that Tony was going to make some remark. Really, he was used to it. He actually looked forward to it now. He liked the joking he had with the older man, without liking the person behind it.

Peter could see that Tony was thinking of something to say, just looking at him with a soft look on his face. “That’s okay, Peter.”

That was weird. Tony didn’t joke, or look at him and scowl. He just said something nice, without anything in return. Peter gently nodded at him, deciding to turn back to put his head against the window. He closed his eyes, letting himself fall asleep.

When he woke up, Pepper was the one that greeted him. She helped him out, thanking Tony as they walked away together. Peter glanced back at Tony, who was engaged in conversation to his bodyguard. He turned back, his heart feeling warmer than it ever had before after a conversation with his forever enemy.

Pepper took him to the hospital wing as soon as they walked in. She was rushing, mumbling a burst of apologies. Getting him down into the bed, Peter’s heart rate grew exponentially.

Ever since the bite, he had been terrified of going into a hospital. If they wanted to take his blood, they’d find a lot more in it than a normal person. Then the whole gig would be over. Deciding to never go back to hospital, unless he was inches away from dying, Peter couldn’t hide the distaste in his face. Pepper assured him it would all be okay, but she really didn’t understand what she was talking about.

As soon as she left to another meeting, with promises that she’d return later, Peter took that as a chance to escape. He could falsify a medical report once he got access to a laptop, but the escape plan was at the top of his list for priorities in that moment.

He sat up from the bed, taking the hospital gown off. He quickly changed into his own clothes, ready to run out of the door. As he tied his shoelaces, he heard the door knob move. He groaned, trying to hide what he was doing before he got caught. Pepper, however, always seemed to figure him out.

But it wasn’t Pepper who walked back into the hospital room. Instead, Tony Stark was stood in the doorframe. His blazer was off, tucked under his arm instead. The sunglasses had moved from the blazer top pocket, back to his face. Peter personally thought he looked pretentious. Who decided to wear sunglasses inside? It defeats the purpose. Peter tried to not look at him, slipping back into the bed.

“Peter. I know all the tricks in the book to hide from hospitals,” Tony said, pulling the visitor’s chair to the side of the bed. He sat on it, his chest facing the wooden frame. “Are you afraid that we’re going to find some drugs in your system? Oh my god, Mr Parker! You’re a drug dealer,

aren't you? I can get you the best rehab centre in the district, Peter-," Tony joked, trying his best to keep a straight face. But, when it came to Tony Stark, it was almost impossible to remain serious at all times.

"Are you ever quiet?" Peter questioned, running a hand through his hair. "Like, honestly, have you ever just sat with someone? But, anyway, it's no big deal. I haven't done drugs, nor am I concussed. I'm perfectly healthy and I'd like to leave this horrid, over saturated, room."

"You think it's over saturated?" Tony pouted, grabbing his phone. He sent a text message, presumably, before returning his attention to Peter. "I've got some painters and decorators to come in. Thus, no more sickly white rooms. Apparently patients expect more from a readily available hospital." He looked at Peter, his face forlorn from the judgement.

"Is that seriously all you got from that?" Peter said, almost as if he couldn't believe it. Pepper had said, many times, to May that Tony wasn't a good listener. He would lock himself in his workshop, forgetting about everything else in the world. He was never serious, always trying to make a joke out of something. Peter was beginning to see these traits himself. "Can I leave? If you say no, I'm going to dismiss myself anyway. So, was that a yes I heard?"

As Peter sat up from his bed, Tony was the one that pushed him back down. Peter watched as he sighed to himself, grabbing the ice pack that Pepper left on the side table to put it on the teenager's forehead. "Nope. You're staying here."

"I don't think I am," Peter said back, pushing back against Tony's hand.

"Yes, you are," Tony replied.

"Not,"

"Are,"

"Not,"

As the familiar conversation continued, their battle was rudely interrupted by a buzz on Tony's watch. He took one look down at it, nodded to Peter (as to silently tell him to stay) and walked out, looking like he had to answer the phone in the process.

Peter took this as an opportunity. He got up, looking outside the door. Much to his disappointment, Tony was stood in sight of Peter's room. He couldn't just walk out.

As he thought of a plan, a leaf floated into the room from a gust of wind. It landed on Peter's arm, disturbing his train of thought. However, it also gave him an idea. He looked over to the window, grinning widely. They might be on the 5th floor, but Peter was Spider-man and he could easily just jump out of the window.

He glanced around the room, not noticing any security cameras. If there was any, Peter knew that Tony would have a lot of questions. Questions that Peter wouldn't answer.

So, from a spur of the moment decision, Peter was out of the hospital room in a flash. Just as his foot left the window, he heard the door open. He couldn't just jump down, at risk of Tony seeing him running away. So, for now, he stuck to the side of the wall that was just underneath the window (hopefully out of view).

Tony walked into the room, expecting to continue his and Peter's little arguments. Well, he couldn't say arguments... Rhodey would bully him if he knew that a kid was besting him. So, he

liked to call it ‘friendly banter’...if they ever asked. They rarely did (his employees and friends had bigger issues than Tony’s squabbling with a fourteen-year-old).

Peter, however, wasn’t there. Tony looked to the window, which was open a lot wider than it was before. A weird feeling of fear washed over him. The billionaire wondered if he’d find a squashed child on his company’s patch of grass.

It wasn’t like he hated Peter. What adult could sincerely say that hated a child? It wouldn’t be very ‘superhero’ of him to say... but the kid just got under his skin. From the day they met, Peter seemed to have a grudge on him. He watched how the kid acted with Pepper and it made him feel that, perhaps, his partner deserved someone better than he did. Peter could see it, it wasn’t that much longer until Pepper did too.

But... he sometimes ‘enjoyed’ (he wasn’t sure if that was the right word, yet) Peter’s company. There would be rare moments, in which they both had a civil conversation without either of them making it awkward. Tony’s interns had been working a lot harder ever since Peter started to use the labs, all because of their friendly competition with the child prodigy (Peter was a lot like Tony, although they didn’t like to admit it). Tony started to feel as if Peter’s fiery personality was the reason why he had spent less time in the lab, alone.

As soon as a positive about Peter Parker wormed its way into Tony’s brain, a massive con would make itself known. There was just something in him that screamed to Tony, to ensure that this child didn’t end up in a ditch. It a weird feeling.

Considering all of this, it wasn’t a surprise that fear shifted into anger about Peter’s escape. He had told Peter to stay still and he refused to listen. If Parker ended up knocked out on the subway, driving to the last train stop, Tony would be the last person to offer a lift home.

However he got out, or wherever he ended up, Tony figured he passed him in the hallway when he was preoccupied. He was almost certain that the door didn’t open, however. Maybe he was getting old.

Tony’s list of ‘reasons why Peter Parker might be a wizard’ definitely had another bullet point on the end, thanks to whatever just happened.

Because Peter was someone who made very bad decisions, he decided that he would still go out on a patrol that night. He waited for May to leave their apartment, sneaking out of his window when he heard the familiar growl of her car.

He slipped on the Spider-man suit in an alleyway, after making sure nobody saw what he was up to. As he put the mask on, he immediately felt like a new person. The pain remained, but the feeling of the wind hitting his face made it feel more like a passing memory.

He swung down each street, grateful for the fact that he remembered to stock up on the web fluid. He hummed to himself, enjoying how it felt.

Ned had been busy that night, so he didn’t have the assistance of his best friend to tell him when something was wrong. He had to rely on his senses alone. When he saw a familiar van driving down the road, his heart sank. This was going too much for a coincidence.

Peter swung down to the road, stopping just a few metres away from where the van was. He wasn’t surprised when its engine stopped. Making eye contact with the man, Peter easily recognised his eyes. The shaven hair was also a dead giveaway. The person sat in the drivers seat was Midtown’s new ‘teacher’. It started to become obvious that the man’s interest in Peter wasn’t anything to do

with his intelligence at school. No, this was far more sinister. What made it all worse, was that they obviously knew who was under the mask and they weren't afraid to watch him openly.

When the door to the car opened, Peter gulped. His thumb rested on the web shooter's trigger point, ready to fight back. As the person stepped out, he was dressed in tactical gear. He had a bulletproof vest on, covered in a weird logo that Peter didn't recognise. His mouth and nose was obscured by a matte black mask, hiding a smirk. What scared Peter most, was the blank stare that was looking directly into Peter's eyes (as if he could see him through the fabric of the mask).

"I'm not afraid of you," Peter said, his voice betraying his words. When the person took a few more steps forward, Peter stuck his ground.

The man said nothing. He just stared. It felt like it went on for a few minutes, only stopping when the radio in one of the two holsters buzzed. He nodded at Peter, turned around and jumped back into the van. Just like that, he left a very confused Peter in the middle of a forgotten street.

He was too shaken up to continue the patrol. He went home, tucking himself into the Star Wars' duvet that Pepper brought him for his thirteenth birthday party. He let himself rest, trying not to think about the man in the van.

Yet another internship day. Peter walked in, expecting to see Pepper in her office. But as he walked in, it was Tony who was in her chair. Peter looked at him, obviously confused. His hand tightened on his backpack, scared that he was going to mention something about the concussion/escape.

He didn't, however, which Peter was grateful for. When he got that out of the way, he was able to focus on why Tony was in Pepper's chair. It was almost as if Tony sensed what he was thinking, interrupting him before he could even speak.

"I'm guessing Pep forgot to inform you. I'm afraid that Miss Potts is unavailable. Surprise meetings, I'm afraid, are unavoidable for the CEO," Tony explained, throwing a lollipop at Peter. He expected it to hit his head, but Peter caught it. He had incredible reflexes. "So, how do you feel about tinkering with some armour?"

Peter tried to process what Tony asked him, until he gave up. His jaw dropped, his eyes wider than they had ever been before. Tony Stark, one of his self proclaimed enemies, had just invited him into his only free space. He must've looked taken back, as Tony was quick to say that it was okay if he didn't. Pepper suggested it, but he didn't mind (he did, but Pepper was forcing him to try and make a friendship with her angel child).

Peter eventually said yes, following Tony like a lost puppy until they entered the lab. Even Tony could admit that Peter's excited face was adorable. His lips parted just slightly, his eyebrows raised and, most importantly, his brown eyes were fully on display. Tony knew his beautiful space had the effect of 'shock' on people, but Peter was showing 'admiration'. He obviously cared about science, if his excited babble was anything to do with it.

They spent most of the evening in silence, both working in silence on their own projects. Pepper did tell him to speak to Peter, but it was wrong to interrupt another's piece of work. Plus, it was sort of nice to not be arguing with him. When she called, Tony remarked that silent Peter is easier to get along with. Loud Peter, not so much.

It was the first time they had spoke to each other for more than one hour without an argument. They tried to have a conversation, for Pepper's sake. They talked about science and it was very cliche. It was nice. However, they both knew they'd be back to their usual antics by a day or so.

Peter decided to take himself on a lonesome tour of the lab.

He froze, however, as soon as he came across what Tony was working on. On his screen was a blueprint for a Spider-man suit. Peter's heart picked up, terrified that he had found out his secret. He didn't say anything, yet, and hoped it was just a coincidence. It was.

Tony told him some very classified information, spilling the beans that a lot of people were looking for the vigilante. Tony wasn't sure why he chose to tell Peter, but something in him told him to trust the kid. He tried not to listen to the feeling, but it was hard.

Peter looked over all of the logos on the screen, trying to match the one from earlier. When he found it, he was unaware of what the company/organisation was.

"Mr Stark? Who's logo is that?" Peter asked, pointing to it on the hologram.

Tony's face grimaced. Peter realised he had made a mistake, when he heard Tony's heart beat faster. He tried to take back his question, but Tony eventually answered him as his memory of whatever happened faded.

"Have you ever heard of HYDRA?"

# Wrapped Around A Finger

## Chapter Notes

this one was a lot longer than I expected! Thank you for all the comments and kudos, they really mean a lot!!!

“HYDRA?” Peter gulped, looking at Tony’s face for a second, before returning his gaze back to the hologram.

HYDRA was after him. Peter’s whole body tensed at the thought. He had been taught all about the secret organisation in his History lessons. Every lesson they had about it would talk praises of Captain America’s heroism, taking down the organisation months after the serum.

Apparently, that was all a lie. Peter knew this first hand, from the terrifying encounter he had during his patrol. It made him wonder about what else his school had lied to him about (most of it, probably).

Peter looked around the lab, trying to find something to ground him. He was used to panic attacks, just not in front of anyone else. He looked over at Tony, who was staring at him as if he was about to break.

“Kid? What’s got you so upset? You know, I’m not good with tears,” Tony said, shutting the hologram down to look at Peter. When the kid didn’t even move, Tony actually did start to feel a little worried. “Peter? Hello? Are you okay?”

The first tear dropped. Peter couldn’t help it. He couldn’t hold them back. As soon as the first dropped, the second did. And then, suddenly, Peter was sobbing in front of Tony Stark. He tried to stop it, gasping for a breath. He turned away from Tony, trying so hard to hide himself away.

Peter’s first panic attack was when he was only six-years-old. To this day, he remembered how it felt. The pressure on his chest, the way his whole body tingled from the anxiety. He would cling onto Ben’s shirt and beg. Beg for everything to just go back to normal. For his parents, mostly.

From then on, he had become tactical with his panic attacks. If he felt one coming, he’d be out his room in seconds. Finding a safe place, he’d wait for the tears to stop until he emerged again.

But, now? He had so safe place to go.

“Peter?” Tony asked, again. “Uh, want me to call Pepper? She wouldn’t mind ditching the meeting she’s in. In fact, she’d be grateful.”

“No,” Peter gasped, “Can you just- I don’t know- please, just- hold my hand-,”

“Hold your hand?” Tony questioned, “Why, Mr Parker. Won’t you buy me dinner first? I’m traditional like that-,”

“Tony,” Peter gasped, trying to hold back the floodgates.

Tony gulped, realising the kid was serious. He wasn’t good at this whole ‘physical contact’ thing.

He looked down to the kid's outstretched hand, his own panic building. What if the kid decided he didn't need that anymore? What if when Tony went to take his hand, it was all just a ruse for Peter to take the arc reactor from him? But, he had to make only a decision. Tony looked at boy and saw himself, for a moment (when he'd cry in his dorm, Rhodey by his side). He took Peter's hand, however awkward it felt, and stayed there until the kid's tears stopped.

"If I knew you'd have that reaction to a hologram, I wouldn't have put it on," Tony said. As soon as the words left his mouth, he realised they were, perhaps, not the most comforting. When Peter's hand recoiled from him, he realised that it definitely wasn't.

"Do you have a compassionate bone in your body? Seriously, do you have to go and make a joke about everything, Mr Stark? Honestly, I could've been crying my eyes out over a friend's death, or something, and you'd probably say you were surprised I had friends." Peter spat, grabbing his coat which was on the floor. He was about to leave, when Tony's response came from where he was sat.

"You know what, kid! I try to be nice to you. I invited you to use my labs, got you from school when you fainted, tried to get you treated for free and now, I even comforted you when you had a panic attack! I don't get why you seem to hate my guts so much, but I really don't appreciate it," Tony shouted back. He couldn't remember the last time he had properly argued with someone, but he wasn't about to back down (even if the opponent was a teenager).

"Then don't! I didn't ask for you to be nice, did I?" Peter shouted back.

"You've got everyone wrapped around your little finger, but I'm the one who really knows who you are. You're a stubborn, rude, ungrateful teenager who thinks the whole world revolves around them," Tony said.

Previously, Tony knew that his anger was more 'playful' to Peter. When they argued, it wasn't anything really serious. However, in this instance, he knew that it was.

Peter's face was screwed up, his fists also clenched. Tony could see how the kid's chest was gently moving up and down, as he tried to keep control of his steady breathing. He had tear tracks down his cheeks, his eyes red, and he was staring directly at him. For some reason, Tony couldn't get himself to care.

"And you? Do you really think everyone is here because they want to be around you?" Peter accused, harshly. "The only reason that people stay is because of your name. If you were just some random person, you'd never have all that you do. Take off the armour... what are you?"

Tony had heard that one before. A lot of times. He remembered when Steve Rogers, the man who used to be his childhood idol, said that (phrased differently, but still.. the same) only a day or so after they first met. He remembered how crushed he was, but he knew he had to hide it. He wasn't allowed to show his emotions. If Howard was still here, he'd agree with them all. Tony was never good enough for him. He never would be, when compared to his father's 'greatest creation' (Captain America). And, alas, he'd never be good enough for anything, or anyone.

"You don't think I've heard that one before?" Tony laughed, "I'll tell you what I've told the rest of them. Genius, billionaire, playboy, philanthropist."

"Whatever," Peter rolled his eyes, "Pepper deserves someone who'll look after her, Mr Stark. I love her like a mother and, you? You don't treat her like she needs. You stay in your lab for hours on end, refuse to come out and eat dinner with her and, then, you never tell her how much you love her. It's disgusting."

Tony was a bit taken back. He told himself that he wasn't good enough for her, but he had never been told that by someone so close to her. "Get out," he managed to say, before he broke down himself.

Peter looked at him, for just a second, before turning around and leaving the lab. He walked over to Miss Potts lab, gave her a hug (just in case he never saw her again, if HYDRA got to him first) and left the tower.

It was raining outside, drenching Peter as he got to the train station. He looked down to his phone, to Tony Stark's contact, as the droplets bubbled onto the screen. Pepper had forced them to switch contacts, just in case something ever happened. He hadn't used it before, but he thought that maybe he should. Texting a quick 'I'm sorry', he jumped onto the train and turned his phone off. Instead, he watched the view outside of the train's windows and tried not to cry.

He never wanted to be someone different to who he was brought up to be. May told him that he was funny, smart, but (the most important of them all) she said he was kind. But... he never gave Tony the chance. He had been horrible to him since the day they met, from his protectiveness over Pepper.

And his face... when Peter said what he did. The cocky smirk that was synonymous with 'Tony Stark' immediately fell into a hurt grimace. Peter recognised the symptoms of the man going into a panic attack. The complete avoidance of eye contact, the shaky hands, the red eyes and the hurt in his voice. He hadn't even stopped to see if he was okay, like Tony did for him. He felt awful.

When he finally got back to his apartment, his curly hair looked as if it had melted to the side of his face. He was drenched, to the point of his clothes sticking to his skin. He thanked the weather, camouflaging his tears from the outside world.

He walked up the stairs, walking past people who didn't spare a glance to him. They lived in their own minds, not bothered about the damaged kid who lived near them.

Getting to his door, he opened it and stepped inside. The rooms were quiet, nobody in them to make any noise. May was at work in the hospital. So, therefore, Peter had to spend another evening alone.

He put his phone on the kitchen counter, too emotional to bother turning it back on. He climbed over to the living room, forgetting dinner (which, really, he shouldn't do with his enhanced metabolism), and sat himself down onto the sofa. He put the first TV show on he saw, trying to get himself to fall asleep.

But he couldn't sleep. He made sure that the doors were locked, over and over again. He shut all the curtains and checked the perimeter for any vans. HYDRA was out there and it made Peter very, very, paranoid.

When he eventually got the energy to get his phone, the first thing he did was message May to make sure she okay. If the evil organisation was after him, he was sure they wouldn't mind taking her out too.

He checked the message he sent to Tony's phone. Tony had replied, only a few moments ago. His reply was short. Peter could almost imagine him typing it out, his phone set aside as he tinkered with one of his suits. It was something of an apology and reassurance.

'It's okay, Peter. I'm sorry too'.

He re-read it a few times. It wasn't a joke, or something for him to jab at. It was sincere. He sent back a few emojis, before sending Ned a few messages.

By the end of the night, Peter still couldn't sleep. He sat straight up on his bunk bed, just staring at the stars from his bedroom window. The panic was building in his stomach, scared for his life.

He knew they'd be here soon. They had been tracking him for a week, or more, and there was no way they'd back off. Peter didn't feel safe. Knowing the organisation that tormented Captain America was out there looking for him, it really wasn't a good feeling.

However, for now, he'd just have to live with it. He couldn't tell anyone. If he did, they'd know about his secret. He'd just have to protect himself. He had always been 'good' at that.

The next time Peter walked into Tony Stark was in a very different context. Peter was over at the tower for a visit, rather than his internship. He was sat up in the penthouse, next to Pepper, when Tony and the Avengers (!) walked in. Tony's was engaged in conversation with them, muttering something about showing them something he had been working on for the team.

The first Avenger who made eye contact with Peter was Thor. Peter's mouth went dry at the sight. He was looking straight at a God! Someone who he learnt about in the books. And, wow, he definitely was as handsome on the screen and in real life.

Peter looked over at Pepper, who just shrugged at him. She waved her hand, as to tell him to introduce himself. Peter, however, felt glued to the sofa. He didn't want to just... go up to the Avengers and say 'hi, I'm Peter Parker, I've been a massive fan of all of you since you saved the world'.

What he did do, though, was worse than he could ever imagine. He stood up, tripping on a lifted rug. His face hit the ground with a bang. Luckily, he didn't feel any pain. On the other hand, he definitely felt embarrassment.

He immediately felt two sets of hands on him. When he managed to look up, Steve Rogers was holding him. He couldn't contain his shock, a hurt grin on his face. "Hi," He smiled, before looking down at the floor again.

Steve smiled softly, letting out a small laugh. "Hello," He replied, helping the teenager sit up. "Are you okay, son?"

Peter was sat up, already feeling a bump on his forehead. He looked at the Captain, trying to focus on his face rather than the pain. He nodded a few times, standing up with assistance from the super solider. "All good, Mr Captain America, sir. My name's Peter Parker. I'm a very big fan of all of you. You're awesome. I, uh, I'm Miss Potts' intern."

Rhodey, best friend of Tony Stark, walked over. He glanced at Peter, before turning around to look over at Tony (who looked like a deer caught in headlights). "Him?" He said, shaking his head with disappointment. "Tony? This is the 'demon spawn' that you've been ranting to me about?"

Peter glared at Tony. How dare he try and ruin his reputation with the Avengers. He turned to Rhodey, when the man turned his attention back to him, and flashed him a sweet smile. "Mr Stark's just jealous, Colonel Rhodes. It's awesome to meet you, though."

"It's just 'James', Pete. Or 'Rhodey', that's what everyone else calls me," Rhodey smiled, patting him on the shoulder.

Peter could've burst from excitement when Steve put a comforting hand around his shoulders. He

said something, something Peter didn't focus on. All he could think about was making this team like him. It was every teenager's dream.

Natasha Romanoff, Clint Barton and Loki (who Peter could've sworn was a villain, but apparently he had changed), then came in. All of them came over, talking to Peter. Tony's invention, the reason for the penthouse visit, was long forgotten (much to his distress).

So, Tony retreated to speak with Pepper instead. He let the Avengers interact with the teen. When Thor came around the corner, with Peter in top of his shoulder's, Tony couldn't help feeling some happiness. The kid had a huge smile on his face, his giggling filling the room. Tony didn't realise, but Pepper watched him as he looked at Peter. She knew that, deep down, her partner was beginning to fall under the kid's spell. She had always said that hating this kid was impossible, so she was happy to see that she could be right.

The Avengers fell head over heels in love with Peter Parker.

Natasha, who was told she'd probably never have her own child, stuck to Peter like a glove. Surprising everyone, she took to being a motherly figure in an instant.

Clint, who had children of his own, acted more like a fun Uncle to Peter (he had his own children to raise, he didn't have to look after another).

Thor treated Peter as if he was another teammate. Although, after he had a conversation with Clint, he started to figure out that Peter was young. After that, he was protective. Having a God at your beck and call really was one of the weirdest things that happened to Peter (and he was bit by a radioactive spider).

Steve showed up to the intern's lab more and more, always having something to speak to Peter about. He helped Peter with his history homework (he was there, after all) and, in return, Peter would teach him about the internet. There were times in which Steve would walk into one of his arguments with Tony, immediately taking Peter's side (no matter what).

Peter had always been a huge fan of Bruce Banner's scientific work. Bruce was the opposite of the Hulk; he was shy and awkward. But, Peter? Peter much preferred the scientist to the "monster" (although the Hulk was awesome too, Banner was just better). He even went down to Bruce's lab, at times, which Tony did make a face at.

Rhodey wasn't at the tower much. He had other things to do with his job in the military. But when he did come down, he talked to Tony first. When he finished telling the man off (for spending too much time in the lab), he'd drop in and say hi to Peter (if he was around). He was lovely to him, always bringing him a present or two if he knew he'd definitely be there.

Loki was a bit of an enigma. None of the team wanted him around Peter, all of them scared that the God of mischief would do something. But Peter was fascinated. Sneaking out of move night, the teenager would go to Loki's room (on Thor's floor), tentatively knocking on the door. The first time it happened, Loki looked confused. He looked around the hallway, half expecting someone else to walk behind Peter. But nobody he did. So, he let Peter in.

"Hi, Mr Loki!" He grinned, waiting for an invite to sit on the bed.

Loki looked at him, his head titled to the left. He didn't know what to say. Nobody ever came to him, all of them scared that he'd break. When Peter stayed, he decided that it would be okay to reply. "Uh. Hello."

"Can I sit with you for a while? Mr Barton is shooting me with a water gun and I needed to find a place to think of a plan to get him back," He explained, looking around the room.

Loki's bedroom was bland. The complete opposite of the man Peter was told about. It didn't scream 'God', it was closer to 'middle-aged'. Peter thought it deserved a makeover, but he didn't bother to say anything right now.

"Sure. I was just- trying to figure out this magic box," Loki said, sitting back down on the mattress. He stared at the television, obviously trying to turn it on through telekinesis (if it worked, Peter would be very jealous).

Peter jumped onto the bed, picking up the remote as he did. He passed it to Loki, showing him how easy it was to actually turn the TV on. He smiled when Loki did it, a shy (and proud) smile on his face. It was nice to see him happy. Peter hadn't seen that before.

"Thank you," He said, "My brother showed me, but, I- uh, I forgot."

"That's okay!" Peter grinned, "How come you were not up with us all? It was a movie night."

Loki's smile slowly fell. He leant against the headboard, a soft sigh escaping his mouth. He looked away, not wanting to make any eye contact with the child.

"I was not sure if I was wanted," he said, eventually.

His voice was quiet, barely above a whisper. It sounded hurt. Peter knew, immediately, that he must've had a tough life. Not knowing if you were loved, or wanted by anyone, would be heartbreak. Nobody, not even a God, should have to experience that pain.

When Peter's hand fell onto Loki's, he jumped. He looked over at Peter, who's face was sympathetic. "Mr Loki, I'd say you are. They all love me, so they'd have to agree with what I say."

"Thank you, little one," He replied.

And the two of them spent some time watching Loki's television, before returning upstairs. Loki stood by the door for a second, before Peter grabbed his hand and pulled him into the main room. Nobody said a thing as Loki sat down, Peter sitting beside him. In fact, they included him (once they saw how Peter was around him, feeling silly that they ever thought he'd hurt the boy) and made him feel happier than he had in a long time. All because of Peter Parker.

Tony still didn't like the kid, but he was still the Avenger that saw him the most (even if he didn't want to). Seeing Peter felt weird, as if he should enjoy being around him. But he couldn't. Every time they'd have a 'nice' conversation, it would eventually fall into something horrid.

Once, when Peter had just finished up in the labs (beside the rest of the people who worked there), he walked outside of the tower to see Steve Rogers sat down underneath one of the trees. He was looking out to the horizon, his hand rested underneath his jaw. When he glanced back, he noticed Peter looking. He called him over, his voice a lot more strained than it had been before.

"Hello, Mr Rogers," Peter smiled, taking a seat next to him.

The sky was dark, but not pitch black. The sun was sitting on the horizon, but it had not quite set. Steve was staring at the skyline, as if he studying it. An old sketchbook was to the side of him.

"Hello, Pete," He smiled. It was a gentle smile (it always was), but Peter knew that it was false. It didn't reach his eyes, like it usually did.

“What’s wrong?” Peter said, cutting straight to the point. “I’m sorry if it crosses the line, but- I just- I could tell.”

Steve let out a light chuckle, almost too quiet to hear, but Peter’s super hearing picked it up. “I’m fine, son. Just reminiscing... that’s all.”

“It must be hard,” Peter stated, looking up to Steve’s face. “What, um, what was it like? Coming to the future..? I read about it, you know, but it must’ve been terrifying actually living it.”

“It was... crazy,” Steve sighed, “If that’s the right word for it. Waking up, feeling like no time has passed at all, and finding out it has been seventy years... you can’t explain the feeling. Everyone I cared for was dead or didn’t remember me and the one person I loved was... long gone.”

“Mrs Carter?” Peter asked, thinking about the lessons they had about Steve Rogers and the people in his life.

For the second time that day, Steve let out a small laugh. This one was louder, but somehow sounded even more sad. “No, no... not Peggy. I did love her, but... not like that. She was like a sister.”

Peter kept quiet, just keeping his eyes on the skyline. They stayed in silence for a while, before Steve put his notebook in Peter’s lap.

“Mr Rogers?” He asked, looking up at him.

“This is my sketchbook that I’ve had since my nineteenth birthday. They found it when I crashed the plane and it was one of the first things they gave me when I woke up. It was a bit of home... and whenever I draw in it, it makes me feel a little emotional,” Steve explained, flipping back a few pages to show Peter a drawing of a man.

The drawing was beautiful. It was clearly drawn back in the forties, as the pages were begging to brown. However, it still looked wonderful. It was drawn like a photograph, like the man was looking directly into the lens. His smile was wide, reaching his eyes. Short hair framed his face, showing off the sharp jawline he had. It was oddly intimate, although nothing was showing. And when Steve flipped a few pages, more and more drawings of the same man showed up.

“His name was Sargent Bucky Barnes. He was my best and only friend before the serum. And I loved him,” Steve said, not even noticing the tear that dripped down his face.

“Were you.... together?” Peter asked, running his hand over the pencil lines.

“We couldn’t call it that back then, but... yeah,” Steve nodded, wiping away some tears from his face. “I just- I really miss him. He died b-before I crashed the plane, but now there’s nobody around that remembers him.. but me.”

“You can tell me about him, if you’d like,” the teenager said, passing the sketchbook back into Steve’s hands. “Then there will be two of us who knows who he is.”

Steve spent the next few hours telling Peter all about Bucky. He spoke highly of him, telling him of their first kiss, about how they snuck away to spend time alone together and the first time they said ‘I love you’. It wasn’t easy to love each other back in the day, but they managed to do it. He didn’t speak of the moment on the train, as he didn’t think his heart could take it.

Steve took Peter home that day, scared for him to go home on his own in the dark. He thanked Peter for his time, driving away and letting Peter stand there to think about how lucky he was to be

friends with the Captain America.

Peter's favourite time at the tower, now, was when he worked in cohorts with Clint Barton. Both of them were incredible at pranks, and their favourite target was Tony Stark.

Their first one was small, and one of the most cliche. Clint distracted Tony in a conversation, allowing Peter to get behind him to attach a 'kick me' note to the billionaire's back. Not a lot of people did try to do it, but they got some good reactions from it.

The next prank, and their latest to date, was Peter's favourite. He snuck into Tony's lab, with permission from FRIDAY, and opened the vents up for Clint to jump down.

They spent hours putting post it notes all over the walls, covering everything. It took a long, long, time to do, but seeing Tony's face when he walked in was totally worth it. He had definitely been annoyed, but he could appreciate the effort they put in and did crack a smile at it.

Tony's retaliation was weak, however. He used FRIDAY to get Clint and Peter into one room, unleashing a whole bunch of silly string down when they crossed the door. However, Pepper happened to be in the room at the same time. It took a long time to get himself out of that ditch.

After a week or so of spending more time at the Avengers tower, Peter had been going out as Spider-man late into the night. There had been days in which he wouldn't get back until 1am. Therefore, Peter was exhausted.

He was getting changed for gym when it happened. Stood in the middle of the room, he felt someone walk up to him. Out of nowhere, somebody's wrist reached out and tried to punch him in the stomach. He wasn't sure why, or who it was, but all he could think of was protecting himself. He couldn't process that he was just in his gym changing room, and not back in the streets as Spider-man.

He grabbed the fist, his eyesight honing in on who it was. Flash was looking at him, wide eyed. Pushing the person back, he heard a gasp. Everyone was looking at them, all waiting for someone to make a move.

The last time Flash had tried to hit him, he looked incredibly guilty. But, this time? He looked like all he wanted to do was make the boy pass out. It might've had something to do with how his friends were cheering, but Peter didn't care. All he could focus on was the fist he caught.

Peter turned away to try and forget that ever happened. But Flash tried again. Peter immediately turned, grabbing the scuff of Flash's shirt. He raised the man up against the locker, "Don't touch me," he spat, scared that he was showing off his strength.

When he let Flash down, he was terrified of everyone's eyes on him. He felt a hand on his waist, pulling him away. He assumed it was Ned, but when he turned around he was looking up at Johnny.

"J-Johnny?" Peter said, taking a deep breath to try and ground himself. He was stupid to think that he could ever control himself with his powers.

"Yeah, Pete. It's me," Johnny said, softly. "You okay?"

"Is he okay?" Flash shouted, "Parker tried to strangle me!"

"And you randomly tried to punch him in the face, didn't you?" Johnny rolled his eyes, pulling Peter to the other side of the changing room.

“Watch out, Parker,” Flash said, adjusting his shirt that Peter scrunched up. He walked over to his friends, all of them circling him to see if he was okay.

“You sure that you’re okay?” Johnny said to him, when they were both sat down. Ned left them be, winking at Peter as he walked out. “Peter?”

He nodded a few times, leaning against Johnny’s body. “Just tired, I mean-,”

Johnny glanced around the room, realising nobody else was in here. He looked at Peter, taking a deep breath. Putting his hand on the boy’s cheek, he gently turned his face towards him. Peter looked into his eyes, Johnny looking back. Their faces moved closer together without thinking, their eyes never lost each other’s gaze. Johnny’s hand moved from Peter’s cheek, down to his thigh. Peter shuddered under the touch, his head not moving from where Johnny moved it to.

“Tell me if I’m getting the wrong idea,” Johnny whispered, before leaning in to press his lips against Peter’s.

Peter’s eyes went wide, his body going stiff. But before Johnny could pull away, Peter put his hand over his and kissed him back.

For a moment, it felt like time stopped. For Peter, it felt like it was only him and Johnny in the world. Johnny’s hand moved up to the back of Peter’s neck, trying to pull him closer than he already was.

The angle of their bodies was awkward, but it didn’t matter. All that mattered was the warmth of the kiss, making both of their hearts beat out of their chest.

Peter’s nose welcomed the smell of Johnny’s aftershave. It was sweet, but not too overbearing. The roughness of Johnny’s stubble rubbed up against Peter’s face, but it didn’t burn. He needed more of it, the kiss speeding up.

When they pulled away for a bit of air, Peter’s excitement knocked away the shock. He let his eyes open, sneaking a glance of Johnny’s face (who’s smile was as wide as Peter’s).

Leaning back in, Peter gasped at the force Johnny used. He grabbed the bottom of Peter’s shirt, pulling him in once again. The material of his shirt was soft to touch, feeling like cloth in his hands. Peter’s hands felt like they worked on their own, roaming around Johnny’s body.

Their lips moved in perfect synch, fitting together like the perfect puzzle. The confidence of Johnny’s technique made Peter weak at the knees. If he wasn’t sat down, Peter was sure they he would’ve probably collapsed onto the floor.

When Peter pulled back for the final time, his heart was beating so fast. From what he could hear, Johnny’s was too. They looked into each other’s eyes, about to say something, when coach Wilson walked in.

“Peter?” He asked, making the two boys pull apart as quickly as they could manage. “I’ve had some reports that you attacked Flash. You need to go to the principal’s office. Unfortunately.”

Coach Wilson knew what Peter was like and, unfortunately, what Flash was like too. He didn’t believe Flash when they told him. But he knew he had to report it, as he was the teacher.

“Sir! He didn’t,” Johnny said, coming to Peter’s defences (which did make Peter swoon, just a little).

"I'm sorry, Johnny, but he has to go," Their coach said, telling Peter to go and get his bag.

Peter ended up getting suspended for the day. When May came to pick him up, she wasn't happy. She didn't say anything to Peter as she walked. In fact, the first time he heard her speak was when she talked to the receptionist.

When they got in the car, May sat in the drivers seat. She was silent, not even turning the car on. Peter sat, nervous, in the passengers seat with his eyes stuck to the side of her face.

He hadn't seen her like this in a long time, not since before Ben's death.

"Why?" She finally said, "I thought you were over this 'fighting' thing, Peter. And now you're bringing it into school? You could've lost your place! I'm so, so disappointed in you."

"I didn't- well, he tried to hit me! All I did was push him away, May!" Peter said back, feeling a little small under her gaze. The pure euphoria of the moment before he left, was replaced by embarrassment and intimidation (but he could still feel the tingle of Johnny's lips on his, making him feel a little displaced from this conversation).

"You're meant to be the bigger person! Do you not remember one thing Ben taught you?" she shook her head, pressing her hands against the steering wheel. "He's been dead for months now, do you even miss him?"

Peter's eyes grew wide for the second time in the last hour, for two very different reasons. He leant away from May, feeling the hurt everywhere. "Do you- do you really think that I don't?"

"You're just doing everything he wouldn't have wanted you to do," May said, "Fighting in class? It's ridiculous, Peter. We didn't raise you like that."

"I-I didn't even fight him, May," Peter said, tears building in his eyes. "I was tried and h-he tried to hit me and-,"

"I don't need to hear your explanation," May said, "I had to come and get you, only moments before I had to go to work. I'm tired of this, Peter."

"Why are you- why don't you want to believe me? I'm struggling, May! He was the one in the wrong here, not me. Like you said, Ben died-,"

"Yes, he did! Because he went after you-!" May shouted.

Peter closed his mouth, recoiling back from May in shock. Tears that had been building up fell, falling down his face faster than they had before. "You think its my fault?" He whispered.

May's own face reflected Peter's. A tear came down her face, her hands trying to reach out to Peter. "Peter, I'm so sorry- I didn't mean- I don't think-,"

"No, it's okay," Peter whispered, taking his seatbelt off. He got out of the car door, grabbing his backpack. He slammed the door closed, running as far as he could away from her.

He found an alleyway, sitting up against the wall. His whole body was trembling, the sobs hitting him like a punch to the gut. He didn't care how loud he was being, all he cared about was the fact that May was right.

It's all his fault.

His mind was infected with the idea. Ben was six feet underground, because Peter decided that he wanted to sneak out. May lost her husband and got stuck with him and she resented him for it.

Your fault.

The voice was loud, coming from a place he didn't know. When he saw a pair of headlights directed right at him, Peter's tears turned themselves off. He could cry later, but for now he needed to get out.

If it was HYDRA, Peter thought to himself for a second that he should just go with them. He had nothing here for him anymore.

But the car got closer before he could make a decision. A person stepped outside, but Peter didn't recognise them as the person it was before. In fact, he didn't see any HYDRA logo on this car or on the clothes he was wearing.

Peter thought he was safe as the man walked up to him. As he walked closer, Peter noticed the knife in his hand. He tried to get away, but it was pressed up against his throat before he could.

"Give me your wallet," the person said, his voice a low and demanding.

Peter blinked a few times, trying not to feel the press of the knife against his neck. He looked straight forward, not wanting the person to know about the backpack next to his feet. If he found the Spider-man suit, he'd find out about his identity and his whole 'being' would be compromised.

Peter stayed silent, only whimpering when the knife was just pressed up further into the flesh. He looked to his side, hoping someone would walk past to see what was going on.

When there was a crash in a nearby alleyway, the mugger was distracted momentarily. Peter got the upper hand, punching him around the face. But when he leant forward to grab his backpack, the person leant forward and stabbed him in the gut.

As soon as the knife entered his stomach, the person looked at the weapon with a terrified face. He took one more look at Peter, before running away from the scene.

Peter had been hit before as Spider-man, or thrown down to the floor and even beaten to the point of bruises, but he had never been stabbed. He leant against the wall, putting a hand over the knife that was still in his gut. He didn't tug it out, leaving it there.

He wasn't sure who to call. He knew May was mad at him and he wasn't sure if he wanted to see her. So, he called Pepper's contact. When she didn't pick up, the pain was getting worse. He needed to do something.

Even though Peter knew he had the phone numbers of all the Avengers, his thumb offered over Tony's contact. He pressed it, holding it against his ear as he sank against the wall.

Tony was down his lab, as always, when he got the call. He stopped his music, getting FRIDAY to answer it. Peter had never called him before. In fact, he didn't usually talk to him willingly. So, getting a random phone call from him at 2pm, when he was supposed to be in school, was quite alarming.

"Hello?" Tony asked. When all he got was deep breathing, he rolled his eyes. "If you think you're about to prank me, Parker, think again. I've got a sixth sense for it. You and Barton don't know what's about to hit you."

Peter couldn't reply. The pain was just too much.

When, once again, nothing came from the other side, Tony started to freak out. "Peter?"

"Tony," he gasped, "Help me, please."

"Ok, uh- shit," Tony said, standing up. Knowing something was definitely wrong. "Just going to track your phone now, Peter. Okay? I swear to god, kid- if this is a prank- I'll be so mad."

As soon as he figured out the kid's location, he sent the information to the suit. Suiting up in the amour, he flew to where Peter was calling from.

Seeing Peter rested against the wall, a knife in his stomach, Tony finally realised how important this call was. He rushed over to Peter's side, not quite believing what he was seeing. He muttered something that sounded like 'holy shit', carefully picking Peter (and the backpack) up in his arms to get him to the hospital.

When Tony got to the tower, he freaked out when Peter sobbed and begged him not to take him down to the medical wing. Seeing the complete fear in the teen's eyes, he complied. He rushed into the penthouse, got all the tools he needed and prepped himself to stitch up a stabbed teenager whom he didn't get along with.

One hour later, Peter's blood was all over Tony's floor and hands (and Peter's torso), but everything was okay. But, he was okay. The knife that was used was on the side, far away from their reach.

Peter was sat up against the kitchen cabinet, a stitch on his stomach where the stab wound was. His shirt was off, as it was drenched in blood.

"Well, uh, this was weird," Tony said, leaning back against the floor, "Do you make a habit of getting stabbed? And then calling me? Because, I gotta say, kid... this really wasn't what I was expecting to get up to today."

Peter managed a laugh, looking up at Tony. "Thanks for that, Mr Stark," he sighed, "and, to answer your question, no. I do not plan to do this again."

"May I ask how this happened? Or is this something you'd like to keep in the mind of Peter Parker," Tony asked, moving over to where Peter was sat. He sat next to him, glancing over the stitches to make sure it all looked good. "And, just to quench my curiosity, why did you call me out of everyone?"

"I got mugged," Peter said, nonchalantly. "Queens is a tough place. And, uh, I don't know- I guess, uh, I knew you would come. You do that. You're a very generous person."

Tony looked over, slightly shocked at the compliment. He gave Peter a strained smile, a bit concerned that the kid got mugged. He started to come up with a plan in his head to make sure the kid was safe at all times... but, uh, he still didn't care too much. He was just, like Peter implied, a man of the people.

"How come you're out of school?" Tony replied, deciding not to bother with accepting the compliment.

"It's nothing,"

"Well, it's definitely something," The billionaire mumbled, "But, uh, keep those secrets of yours."

“Thanks for everything, Mr Stark,” Peter told him, before giving Tony a real smile for, possibly, the first time. He tried to get up, but winced when the stitches burnt.

“Hey, kid. Stay there, okay?” Tony told him, “Or I can help you into one of the spare rooms? Don’t worry, I’ll leave you be. Just, uh, want to know you’re not bleeding out walking the streets.”

Peter thought about something to say back, but stopped himself. Tony was trying his hardest, so Peter decided to respect that. He looked up at the man, nodding gently.

“Ok then, Pete,” Tony said, getting up. He knelt next to the boy, wrapping his arms around the boy’s shoulders. He lifted him up, walking them towards the spare room.

When the billionaire finally placed Peter down, he put a blanket over the boy’s body. He put Peter’s backpack on the floor next to him, before leaving the room and shutting it behind him.

There was no way he was getting soft with Peter Parker. It just wasn’t possible.

## Figuring It Out

### Chapter Notes

Once again, thank you for all the support! I'm really enjoying writing this story! Some of it is out of my comfort zone, but I hope that I'm doing it justice!

TW- violence + use of knives,

May apologised for what she said, the second Peter walked back into the apartment. He had spent the night at the tower, forgetting to tell her. However, luckily, Tony told Pepper, who relayed the information to May. So, when Peter walked through the door, he was immediately taken into a bone crushing hug, apologetic words coming out of her mouth.

He tried to let her know that everything was okay, but she couldn't stop crying. It was clear to Peter that she couldn't believe what she said, as she didn't let him go for ten minutes.

For May, Peter was like looking at Ben back from the dead. When he'd say something that Ben would, she'd think that her husband was back for a split second.

Losing the love of her life was hard. It made her a single mother to Peter, made money a bigger issue than ever before, but, most importantly, she felt isolated.

Ben Parker was the one she had always relied on. He was her emotional backbone, the only reason why she tried so hard to be better. He saved everyone's lives, but someone took his in return.

May always thought about the day they met. It was a windy day, the sun barely peaking through the clouds. She had done her makeup for a date, trying to make herself look immaculate. The guy who asked her out was so popular and every girl wanted to be with him. She couldn't believe that he chose her. But, when she pulled up to the diner he told her to meet him in, he didn't show up. She waited for hours and hours until some girls passed her, each of them giggling. It was only then when she realised she had been set up.

When she finally stepped outside, the clouds had only grown darker. And then, just as life couldn't get worse, the heavens opened and it started to pour on her. Getting in her car, it didn't move. When she got out, she immediately noticed the flat tire.

Having enough, she collapsed onto the hood of the car. She was a tough woman, it definitely took a lot for her to start crying. So, she didn't. She composed herself, deciding to just walk back to her house.

Ben Parker was in the same parking lot, sat beside some of his friends. They were a year older than May, all of them seniors at their high school. When he made eyes with her, she could've melted. He was clearly looking straight at her, as if she was someone he wanted. That had never happened before.

He walked over, putting an umbrella over her head. He called her a pretty lady, whilst telling her that there was only one thing he'd change about her. Thinking she was about to get insulted, she already began to argue with him. That only made him like her more. But when he said 'your last

name', she immediately backed down and giggled. She had never 'giggled' in front of a boy before. Being around him was the happiest she had ever been, and they both knew that it was love at first sight.

Ben quickly made his promise about giving her the family name. After only two years of being together, Ben popped the question in front of a gas station as the rain poured down around them. He just couldn't wait anymore, too in love with her to imagine a different future.

Peter was already staying with them when his parent's plane went down. Telling his nephew that his parents were not coming back, was the hardest thing Ben ever had to do. They put having their own kids on the sidelines, telling each other they'd wait until it was the right time.

But, life for the Parker's consisted of tragedy after tragedy. And they never got to have kids of their own, in the end. May realised, however, not long after he passed, they did. Because Peter wasn't just her nephew, he was her son. From the moment the little toddler sobbed in her arms, accidentally calling her mom when she put him to bed, she knew that her heart was destined to be shared by Ben and Peter Parker.

So, the guilt that was eating up her. Telling her son that it was his fault her husband died, wasn't something she ever thought she'd do. May didn't even believe that it was, it just a stupid split second decision that caused a fallout so large, that she wasn't sure she could fix it.

And when Ben died? He didn't give back the piece of her heart that he took, he took it right down with him. Every time she thought about him, or what Peter went through, she'd go weak at the knees. All she wanted was to see him one more time and tell him that she loved him. So, for now, she'd just have to make sure Peter knew it.

Peter wasn't sure if he could completely accept her apology, but he knew that it was a start. They had arguments before, but it had never been this harsh.

He did understand how it came out, however. She had been scared, frustrated, and he knew that it was just something that slipped out. He knew that he could be better with her too.

But, although he didn't tell her, he secretly agreed with what she said. Maybe getting stabbed was just comeuppance for getting his uncle killed. Knowing May knew it too, made Peter's guilt worse than it had been in the past. He'd do anything to get him back, even if he had to switch places. He just wanted May to be happy.

And, from that moment, when all they could do was hug, he knew that they'd be okay. Even if it would take him a while.

Perhaps it was why Peter Parker was hanging out in the Avengers tower a lot more than usual, ignoring every other thing going wrong in his life.

Ever since the stabbing, Peter grew closer to Tony Stark (as much as both would them wouldn't admit it). Peter had to beg for the man not to tell anyone, but he eventually agreed to it. However, the compromise was that he had to let Tony check up on him now and then.

Everybody noticed the shift in their relationship. They continued to squabble, almost every hour they were together, but every Avenger noticed how they'd sit just a bit closer, or they'd be less harsh with the words they'd say. Or when they'd go down to the lab, they'd see Peter Parker sat at one of the desks with headphones plugged into his ears, or telling Tony a story about something that happened the day before.

Wherever they saw Tony, or Pepper, Peter would be just around the corner.

"No," Tony told Pepper, curling up closer into his side of the bed. "Nope, no-, no thank you."

Pepper had woken him up, way too early, for a conversation he definitely didn't want to have. She was under the impression that Tony was besties with Peter now, but that couldn't be further from the case. And now? She wanted to take him along to one of their dates nights. Which was inappropriate, in his opinion. But when Pepper got an idea, she'd rarely shift on it.

He could just imagine it now. The smart-lipped, teenager, jabbing him in the side of his torso with a fork as Pepper dined on the finest lobster. When he'd go to retaliate by covering his food in sugar, Pepper would see and he'd be the one that got in trouble.

The, frankly, treacherous side of his brain wasn't co-ordinating with the rest of him. There was a bit of Tony, some sort of pull, that made him want to accept it. He could make sure Peter wasn't getting mugged, or engaging in anti-social behaviour (Tony assumed that was Parker's favourite pass time).

And, really, it would be nice to have him there. The kid seemed to have so many ideas for the Spider-man suit he was building, and having a second opinion was always important. Even if you were a genius, playboy.. and.. the rest.

Pepper laughed, putting her hands onto Tony's shoulders. She gently moved herself so that she was tucked into his side, pressing kisses up and down the man's jawline. She took a breath, breathing in Tony's natural scent. There was always something intoxicating about it, making her plan to get up and work difficult. She noticed the expression on Tony's face, and she immediately grinned. He was obviously debating with himself and losing.

Just like she had predicted from the moment she asked, Tony's constant stream of 'no' easily shifted in 'yes'. Pepper knew he liked Peter, and she was going to get him to admit it eventually.

That morning conversation lead to Tony Stark driving towards Peter's apartment, Pepper in a different car on the way to meet them there. He wore a button up white shirt, with a navy and white striped tie around his neck. The blazer over his shoulders was navy, a white handkerchief tucked into the front pocket. Pepper brought suit trousers for him, matching the colour of his jacket. A pair of formal brown shoes brought the outfit together, making Tony look like he came straight out of a fashion magazine.

He arrived to the kid's apartment, parking one of his smartest cars among different vehicles that didn't look like they belonged amongst his. He didn't want to think like a snob, but it was more of a fact than a statement. He waited for a second, but got a little impatient when the kid didn't walk out.

Looking down at his phone, he read over the information Pepper sent him about where Peter lived. He stepped out of his car, checking the door to make sure it was locked. Moments later, he found himself in front of the Parker's apartments front door. Knocking gently, he waited for someone to open it.

And when they did, it opened up to a disheveled looking Peter Parker. His blazer was scrunched up and his hair was messy. His eyes were a little red, like he had been crying for hours. He looked at Tony, desperation in the way he stared.

"Uh, you okay?" Tony asked, stepping inside. He brought the door to a close, looking around the apartment he had never been too before.

The apartment was a stark difference to what Tony was used to. From the moment he was born, the lavish life was everything he knew. His father put him with the butler's, the nanny's and everyone else, but him. He never knew what it felt like to be loved by his parents. Before Rhodey, there was no-one on this earth who liked him without his money (perhaps Jarvis did, but Tony figured he was obliged to by his contract).

His houses were always huge, designed by an architect. Tony didn't settle for anything less than perfect. The inside was always perfectly crafted, with the most expensive sets of furniture money could buy. That was all he was used to.

He blinked at the interior, shaking his head to try and focus his attention back onto the 'boy in peril' who didn't say anything. Instead, he grabbed Tony's wrist (Tony was surprised that it didn't make him flinch) and pulled him towards the bathroom.

On the sink, there was a set of hair products that were all over the place. Peter's hands were covered in the stuff, his hair pressed up and not styled in the way he wanted. The grey tie the kid, obviously, wanted to wear was tied up in a mediocre way. Evidently, he was having some issues with getting ready.

"This," Peter said, a squeak in his voice (making him sound very young). "I can't do this, Mr Stark. I don't know how to do... fancy dinners. I, uh, Miss Potts brought me this suit and I-I don't know how to wear it and- I'm way in over my head here. Even knowing you- and the Avengers- having money is like foreign concept to me and-,"

Tony put his hand on the kid's, padded, shoulder. "It's okay. Calm down, Pete," he said, "we'll get you all sorted out, we've got plenty of time."

Peter nodded, not trusting himself to say much more as he knew some tears would fall. He looked down at the emerald suit he had on, tailored to fit his exact measurements. A shiver ran down his spine, nervous, when Tony put his collar up. The man's hands took the grey, with a small detail of spots, tie in his hands.

"Jarvis, my butler, was the first one to help me tie a tie," Tony told him, positioning them so that Peter could look at himself in the mirror. Peter's eyes tracked Tony's face, as the man stood tall behind him (Tony was, secretly, happy that he was actually taller than someone. He wasn't sure how long it would last). "It's a tough thing to do, when you first try. Quite daunting, isn't it?" When Peter nodded, Tony chuckled a little to himself. "I know. Pepper's a bit of a devil to throw you in the deep end."

A protective urge in Peter forced him to speak back, "No! She's not, she didn't- I mean, she tried to show me over a video call. But, uh, it didn't work? I told her it do though. So, don't blame her."

Tony finished tying the fabric, tightening the knot. He straightened it out, making sure it all looked okay. "Yeah, I know," he sighed, "just a joke, kid."

"Oh," Peter said, a little blush playing at his cheeks.

"But, hey? It's good that you care so much. She deserves someone like that. Not someone like me," Tony said, remembering what Peter had said to him once. He took the hair product he thought would be good for Peter's curls from the sink. He put it in Peter's hair, styling it in a way that framed the boy's face.

"Mr Stark, look I-," Peter tried to apologise, but they were both interrupted by Tony's phone.

“Save it,” Tony mumbled, before turning around and taking the call.

As soon as the call ended, they both made sure that Peter looked good in the suit. They left the apartment, Peter locking it behind them. Getting into the car, the drive that proceeded it was silent (and, therefore, very awkward).

Both of them arrived at the restaurant with ten minutes to spare. Even if they were early, the staff immediately got them to his table. All of them circled around the man, wanting to be the person that served the great Tony Stark (and co). Perks for being a famous Avenger, Peter guessed.

Pepper walked in exactly on time. Her long dress fit to her body, showing her off beautiful figure. It was a deep blue, with a low v neck. Everything about her was beautiful. Her ‘strawberry blonde hair’ bounced as she walked over to their table, curled up at ends. As soon as she saw both of them, a gorgeous smile spread over her lips.

The dinner went by quickly. Pepper and Tony lead the conversation, Peter picking at his food to distract himself. The room was loud, full with people from all around the world and different cultures. Peter couldn’t help spending time ‘people-watching’, getting glimpses of their everyday lives that he shouldn’t know anything about.

When he did have a conversation, Peter’s attitude went from ‘down-trodden’ to ‘animated’ and ‘excited’. He managed to speak Tony Stark’s ear off about something science related. That never happened before. Tony had never met anyone who matched his enthusiasm for the subject. It was, sort of, warming.

The food, of course, was delicious. Peter ate more than he probably should have, but it tasted so good that he didn’t care at all. And Tony did finally smile at him as he ate, even slipping some of his own food onto his plate to let him try it.

“So, uh, did you have a nice time?” Tony asked him, as Pepper went to pay the check (with Tony’s credit card, of course. Although, Pepper did pay on same occasions. But, Tony liked to show off when they had company. Even if said ‘company’ was a teenage devil that, somehow, infiltrated their lives back in 2009).

“Yeah,” Peter said, actually telling the truth. He wasn’t sure if he should lie or not, but he thought about what Tony had tried to do for him recently. He, at most, needed to be polite. To be like Uncle Ben, the man he failed. “I did. Thank you.”

They shared a smile, not doing much else until Pepper came back. They left the restaurant, trying their best to ignore the paparazzi from taking too many photos of them.

The formal dinners only increased, Tony getting more and more comfortable with having Peter around. One time at dinner, Pepper witnessed Tony taking the menu straight from Peter’s hand (without hesitation). To anyone else, this little movement would be completely normal. But for Tony? This meant he trusted Peter, even if he didn’t realise.

Meanwhile, Peter spent a lot more time out as Spider-man. Sometimes with Ned, at times without. There was the odd patrol when he ran into Iron Man, enjoying the squabbling he had with the shell head (a little of him missing the way he argued with Tony Stark). And, of course, Spider-man immediately got along with the rest of the Avengers (on the rare occasion they worked together).

Peter’s fighting skills increased ten-fold, from the day he first started. Beginning as a vigilante, his footing and skills were weak. But, he learnt on the job. He knew he was getting better, but he also had a lot to learn.

So, when the Avengers asked him to come and fight for them again, he jumped at the opportunity. He couldn't wait to show off his new moves to Miss Black Widow even if she couldn't compliment the man behind the mask, or even in front of the mask (he always was quick to swing away before they could check up on him, anyway).

Peter swung over to the tower, walking down a familiar path dressed in the suit. He tried to act like he didn't know the place as 'spider-man' hadn't been here before. But he had never been a good actor. He walked straight up to the elevator, humming to himself as it took him up to the Avengers floor.

Exiting the doors, everybody's eyes fell onto him. He walked up to them, making sure that the voice modulator was definitely on. He was about to spend time with some of the world's best super spies, so he couldn't be flippant.

"Spider-man," Tony said, his voice slightly strained. "Don't see why we need the backup, but here you are!"

"Always jump at the opportunity to ruin your day, Mr Stark," Peter said, almost slipping up. Spider-man didn't call him 'Mr Stark', but Peter Parker definitely did.

Natasha's eyes narrowed at his comment, because of course they did. Mr Stark was originally the biggest problem for him, identity wise, but now he knew Natasha Romanoff. Simultaneously the scariest and kindest person he ever met, he knew she'd find him out eventually.

They went over the briefing for the mission, as soon as Tony and Peter stopped squabbling. Scrambling into the jet, Spider-man spent most of his time sat with Steve and Natasha, talking to them about everything (he tried his best to be vague).

And then, the battle began. And this one was serious. A lot more serious than anything Peter had been involved with before. This wasn't taking cats out of trees, or stopping a small mugging. This was a robot invasion. Something like he saw in a sci-film. If his life wasn't in immediate danger, he would've snuck a photo of it to send to Ned. Well, he'd probably see it on the news anyway.

"Holy shit!" Spider-Man shouted, ducking as a laser beamed right at him. "This is awesome!"

Tony rolled his eyes. Whoever this kid was, he always tried his best to get underneath his skin. But, for some reason, he couldn't help to feel attached to him. He let out a little laugh as he listened to Steve's 'language lecture'. It didn't seem like the little Spider cared, as he just continued to speak in the same way anyway.

The Spider jumped from a building, shooting a web to another to fly between the two structures. Tony was fascinated. The web tensile strength must have been off the charts. However this man was, he was a genius. Tony wanted to pick at his brain. But he also wanted the kid to be less annoying.

"Spidey!" Tony said, flying after the suited-man, "Remember your job. It's to stay low and,"

"Stay low?" Peter groaned, taking a robot out as he did. He twirled around, hitting one that was right behind him. Thank god for those senses of his. "Come on! You didn't say that! I'm literally one of the 'air guys', why should I stay low?"

"Just listen!" Tony shouted, keeping his eye out for the new member of their team. He looked young, and about the same height and build of Peter, so he knew he couldn't bear to see this kid get hurt (once again, he didn't care his Peter got hurt. Well, he did. Just so Pepper wouldn't be upset,

that's all. No other motive).

"I don't think so," Peter mumbled under his breath, making his way over to the epicentre of the invasion. When he felt hands underneath his armpits, he struggled. When he finally managed to see who it was, he felt incredibly angry.

Tony flew the kid over to a nearby rooftop, holding him tighter as he tried to get out. He put him down, crossing his arms and looking down at him as he did.

"You listen to me!" He shouted, not giving a crap that their comms were still on. He didn't care if their team heard this argument. It needed to be said. "This isn't a movie, Spider-man. I don't need you going against orders. It doesn't just put you in danger. It puts everyone in trouble as well, you ass."

"You're not even in charge!" Peter snapped. He looked behind Tony's head, the battle raging on. "Why are we doing this now? Can your ego not take it that somebody doesn't want to listen to you? New flash, Tony, I'm not a part of your little family. I can do what I want."

"Not if you're going to get us all kil-," Tony started to say, but he suddenly was down on the ground. The other man's body was over him, a scream spitting out of his mouth. Tony tried to push him off, but it didn't work. Nothing did.

"Why did you do that?!" Tony shouted, when the man finally got off him. He jumped up, watching as to robot that took the shot flew to the ground. "I'm in the suit! I could've taken it!"

The spider-man's suit was ripped, a gash of blood on his upper hand. The hand was over the wound, the mask looking down at the ground. He could hear the hero crying, both in real life and through the comms. He stepped forward, trying to help him, but the man only stepped back.

When Peter spoke, he realised his voice modulator had come offline. "I- I wanted to make sure you didn't die- and I, uh-"

He took one look at Tony and realised he was starting to figure something out. He looked to the side, mumbled a quick 'sorry' and shot a web at a nearby building. Swinging away, he tried not to listen to the comms calling him back.

Just before he threw the earpiece out of his ear, Peter heard the confused mumble of 'Peter?' coming from Tony's mouth. Shit, that wasn't good. That wasn't good at all. He tried not to think about what just happened. Tony figuring his identity out, meant that everyone else would. And he wasn't ready for that.

Peter Parker had been anxious for about 20 hours, as he sat in the back of one of his classrooms. He hadn't had the chance to speak to Johnny yet, since they hadn't been able to get any time alone. Johnny was quite strict about talking in person. He didn't want it to be over text. How traditional, Peter thought.

Also, he couldn't stop thinking about how Tony knew. Tony knew and he hadn't said a word to him. Or, perhaps, he didn't know at all. Maybe he assumed it was a different Peter.

But when Johnny looked back at him, all of his bad thought's drifted from his brain. All he could focus on was that smile.

Ned wasn't even in school that day. So, when 2nd period ended, he didn't have anyone to sit with. But as he took a walk down the hallways, set onto getting to the cafeteria, somebody's hand pulled him into a supply closet.

Peter flinched, squeaking, when a hand came over his mouth. He squeezed his eyes shut, thinking it was Flash, or one of his goons, about to beat him up. Or maybe it was HYRA, infiltrating his school to get with him. For a second, he had a thought that he'd be leaving Midtown in a bodyguard. If the team really did get to him, this was it. He was going to die and-

"Hey, Peter, shh, I'm sorry," Johnny said, lowering the hand.

All of Peter's worries dissipated as he heard Johnny's gentle tone. He let his eyes open, taking in the sight of the most handsome boy in the school.

Johnny crowded Peter's space, taking both of his hands as he did. "So, we haven't had a chance to speak about... you know."

Peter blinked a few times, wanting nothing more than to awkwardly brush his hair in front of his face to hide it. But, his hands were currently preoccupied. He wasn't sure what to say, just looking at Johnny instead.

"Don't want to speak, huh?" He whispered, and that shouldn't do anything to him, but it definitely did. "That's fine. We don't have to actually speak," he added, his eyes flickering down his lips. Peter's eyes focused in on how Johnny's tongue crept out of his mouth to wet his bottom lip. And wow, he knew how to set the mood.

"Well, come on then," Peter whispered, trying to lean into Johnny's space.

"You're so eager," the boy laughed, dropping Peter's hands. He moved his hands up to Peter's waist, pulling him up towards him. He pressed his lips against Peter's, both of them immediately melting into the kiss.

This kiss was a lot more intimate than the one before, both of them able to move more freely. Johnny's hand brushed through Peter's curls, slightly tilting his head up as he did.

Peter's mind, that had been preciously worried about everything in his life, was almost blank. All that up there was Johnny. Johnny's hands. His lips. His body. His scent. His... everything.

The tip of some shelves dug in Peter's back, as Johnny pushed him up against it. Peter's feet lifted from the floor, and all Peter could think about was the strength in the boy's arms. It felt like flying, not just from how he held him. The butterflies in his stomach tickled him, making their kiss feel like it was all he would ever need.

Knowing what Johnny's lips tasted like, Peter wasn't too sure if he could ever let them go. It was an obsession, one he never wanted to be treated for.

When Peter pulled back, he managed one breath before Johnny leant back in. His hand crept underneath Peter's shirt, exploring the abs he hid from the world. Johnny made a noise in the back of his throat, pushing Peter even higher up against the wall.

It was the most exciting thing that had ever happened to Peter. He wrapped his legs around Johnny's waist, letting the man just hold him there.

When they finally stopped, Peter's lips were wet and plump. It was obvious what both of them had just been doing. Johnny's cheeks were flushed, not moving his arms away from Peter. He wasn't about to let go, when he had someone so brilliant in his space.

"Think it's safe to say that you like me, huh?" Johnny laughed, making sure Peter's shirt was straightened down. "I definitely like you."

“Why me?” Peter whispered.

“Why you?” Johnny asked, looking a bit taken back. “Come on. You did not just ask me that. It’s so obvious.”

“I don’t think it is,” Peter mumbled, looking down to the floor, blush creeping up on his face.

Johnny let Peter down, adjusting the boy’s jacket as he did. He leant in, giving him a kiss on his cheek. Leaning back again, Johnny’s hands cupped his cheeks. “You are the most beautiful person,” he whispered, “You’re the smartest person in the whole school. Very hot. Brave. Selfless. Hot. Did I mention hot? I did? Well, you are. Very much so.”

Peter giggled. And wow, a giggle? He couldn’t remember the last time he did that. Johnny seemed to like it, however, as he gave him a peck on the lips again.

“I can’t kiss you properly again, as I’m afraid I won’t stop,” Johnny whispered, laughing. Instead, he made sure Peter agreed to text him. And then? He left, leaving Peter alone in the closet to think about what had just happened.

Peter put a finger on his lips, the other person’s taste lingering on them. He watched Johnny walk away, a ‘lovesick’ smile on his face.

The ‘blank mind’ he wanted to keep, didn’t last very long. When he was sat in one of his latest classes, the whole room went silent. Peter’s fear peaked, afraid that something bad was happening. But when he looked to the doorway, Tony Stark was stood there.

His stomach dropped, the reason for why he was worrying came circling back to him. He glanced over at the teacher, and then back to Tony. He put a hand in his hair, silently groaning underneath his breath. As his teacher spoke to Tony, starstruck, he tried not to listen.

‘Causing irritation’ is the most typical definition of the word ‘annoying’, but Peter didn’t agree. If he looked it up in the dictionary, he was pretty sure a picture of the hero would be there instead. Maybe the actual word was ‘nuisance’ (‘a person or thing causing inconvenience’). That definitely sounded like Tony Stark, in Peter’s opinion.

But, he couldn’t think of that now. Not when Tony Stark was staring at him, knowing that he was Spider-man. It was, possibly, the most terrifying thing that happened to him (maybe, or maybe he was just being dramatic).

He got up when Tony addressed him, a little bit of him feeling smug that Peter Parker, ‘the biggest nerd at Midtown’, was about to leave school in tow with an Avenger. Suck that, Flash Thompson.

As soon as they got in the car, Tony dropped the fake smile he used whenever he was around the public. He looked over Peter, obviously glancing for any issues he might’ve got. His eyes immediately zoned in on Peter’s arm, but the wound was gone. Thank you super healing.

“Spider-man, huh?” He said, making sure nobody was listening. “Good to know that you’re a little shit in both of your egos.”

“Oh, ha-ha,” Peter mumbled, crossing his arms. He tried to play off that he wasn’t nervous, but he was completely breaking down inside. “Uh, please don’t tell anyone else about that. Secret and all.”

“The Avengers know,” Tony said, “Not by fault of me, they heard our little engage over the earpieces. The earpiece that you broke, by the way. Expect a bill. No, i’m kidding. I’m a

billionaire. Hang on, I'm getting off track," he waved his hand to the backseat, where a brown paper bag was. "Also, you thought you could hide it from Nat? Apparently she already called it. Something about your reflexes. Anyway.... that's a gift for you, there."

Peter watched Tony ramble, an amused smile on his face. He hadn't seen much of this side of Tony (probably because he argued with him so much) and he really enjoyed it.

He turned around in his seat, getting the paper bag. He held it in his hands for a second and looked up at Tony, as if he was asking for permission to open it.

"Go ahead. It is yours, after all," Tony said, still looking around. He obviously knew something was up, as their conversation in the lab had indicated before. Peter assumed he was looking out for HYDRA, as they could be anywhere.

When Peter opened it up, he noticed the red immediately. His eyes sparkled, not wanting to hold it up incase some paparazzi caught sight of Tony's car. The Spider-man suit was so intricate, looking a lot more advanced than the one he had before.

"Oh my god," Peter whispered, "Mr Stark! This is awesome!"

"I know, made it myself," Tony winked. "Glad you like it."

"Well, of course I like it!" Peter replied.

Making his first Spider-man suit, it looked like it had been torn to shreds. He wasn't sure how to work the machine, and he got a few cut fingers in the process. Slowly, he managed to add more tech to help him out. But, obviously, he hadn't figured out how to make suits like Tony Stark did.

Peter's enthusiasm distracted Tony for a second, making him miss the van that pulled up behind them. He smiled at Peter, reaching over to push hair out of the boy's face. His hand froze, not believing how fatherly the moment was. Both of them looked at each other, until Peter's hand made the bag rustle.

"I gotta talk about the elephant in the room, Pete," Tony said, with a sigh. "Look, okay- um, we both know that HYDRA are out there, looking for you..."

"They won't get me, Mr Stark," he whispered. "I got it!"

"Nice optimism, kid. But, look- we can sort out some safety procedures and-," Tony said.

"I'll be fine," Peter interrupted.

But, only hours later, when Tony dropped him off (after some testing of the Spider-man suit), he walked in his apartment. The door wasn't locked, which should've been the first red flag. May was out at work, but one of the lights were on. Peter figured that it could've been an accident, but (unfortunately) it wasn't.

The light flickered, making Peter's heart jump. The light turned off, causing the apartment to be pitch black. And when they came back on, crowds of people were stood around him. A knife was to his neck, to his gut, to his back and to every piece of skin you could imagine.

And, in the low light, Peter would recognise that logo from anywhere. HYDRA.

If Tony was still there, Peter could imagine him saying 'I told you so' in his ear. But, he wasn't.

And Peter knew that he'd be dead if he moved an inch to try and call him.

Well, he wasn't so fine after all. So much so for optimism.

# I Will Always Find You

## Chapter Notes

I thought I lost this and I was devastated as it's probably my favourite chapter I've wrote so far!! Luckily I got it back:))

Tw- gun violence, implied child abuse (small mention).

It was a quiet night at the hospital. May thought the day would be smooth sailing, but it turned out to be one of the worst days of her life.

She drove home, humming to the radio. There was a little piece of her that felt weird, but she hadn't thought anything of it. Peter hadn't texted her to say he was home safe, but she suspected that he was just because he was tired (or that he didn't want to, from their argument a week or so before).

But, as she walked up the stairs towards their apartment building, she knew something was wrong. The door to their place was open. Not just unlocked, but left ajar.

When she walked in, she dropped everything she was holding in shock. There was a trail of blood on the wooden floors, towards the door. Surely enough, when she looked outside of their apartment, the trail continued on.

She immediately ran to Peter's room, knowing he wouldn't be there, but she just had to know. When his bunk bed was empty, she fell to the floor.

Numb. It was the only way she could describe what she was feeling. It took her a few seconds before she broke down. Not her Peter, it couldn't be. She had already lost so much, she couldn't go through all of it again.

Her first point of call was Pepper. She had to get people, who loved Peter just as much she did, on this case. She jumped in her car, driving as fast as she could towards the Avengers tower. She was sure that she probably broke the speed limit, but she didn't care.

"May?" Pepper asked, noticing her best friend's tears. She hadn't seen the woman cry since Ben, so she knew something was wrong.

Pepper was dressed in one of Tony's shirts, with an old pair of pyjama trousers on underneath. She was clearly tired, rubbing her eyes as she adjusted to the light. It was about 3am, after all.

Jarvis was the one who let May in, and who woke Pepper up. Before May could say what happened, Tony entered the room from his lab. He wore a tank top, which was covered in oil and grease. He didn't look as tired as Pepper, but she assumed he was used to the lack of sleep.

"Oh, didn't think anyone else would be up and about," Tony smiled, looking a bit guilty. "You see, I finally figured out who Spider-man was. Don't ask, I won't tell. And I figured he needed some extra stuff, like some security. Seriously, kid is in need for an upgrade. Even though I already gave him one. You can always do better, in my opinion. Anyway, I was going to fly it over to him today. In fact, I was even going to offer a safe house for a while. You know, danger is always about," he

rambled, before looking over at May for the first time.

His entire demeanour changed. His shoulders straightened, his lips turned into a tight frown. May's tears meant one thing. He was too late. HYDRA knew Tony knew, and they also knew he'd do anything to keep him away from them. So, they needed to swoop in and take him before he had the chance to save him.

It was fault.

"Peter," May managed to say, only confirming what Tony had observed.

The kid was gone and there nothing he could do about it now. He looked over at Pepper, who collapsed onto her knees. Tony's heart burst at the sight of the person he loved crying, but he also knew the pain in his heart was down to the loss of little Peter.

He wasn't sure how he'd tell the team. He imagined their faces, broken. But then, they'd turn. Blame, it was the word that circled Tony's mind. It was all his fault. He knew that they'd accuse him of not protecting their kid and he couldn't hold it. He wouldn't handle it. Rejection was the worst, but losing the teen still might actually be the worst of all.

"No-," Pepper whispered, shaking her head. "No," she grabbed May's hand and squeezed it as she cried. They held onto each other, leaning on the other for support. Tony, however, had no one.

He decided he need to go, before he had the chance to breakdown in front of Pepper and co. Walking down to the lab, he initiated a lockdown protocol to keep himself in. He didn't need to see anyone else right now. Tony looked up at his shelves, where Peter's first robot he made was. It sat there, gathering dust. The little thing beeped and Tony wasn't sure if that happened before.

"Oh, Peter," Tony said to himself, allowing a tear to form.

He took it in his hands and just stared at it for a while. He missed the kid. He missed the arguments. He missed the way he'd try to hold back a laugh whenever Tony made fun of Steve, or how'd he whisper in the back of the room with Clint when they thought Tony wasn't listening. Most of all, he just missed having him there. Even if he didn't ever say it, or if Peter even liked him (a part of him knew the kid probably hated him still), he cared for the little boy.

Tony was just about to go and give the kid some security, after feeling like he shouldn't have dropped him off. It wasn't safe out there, with so many people like HYDRA wondering the streets. But, he was just too late.

He wasn't sure of the moment where his heart swapped over. Was it when the kid came in after he was stabbed? Or, maybe, it was when he did his tie? Or, even, it went all the way back to the first time the kid used his lab.

Whenever it was, it didn't matter. Because Peter was gone, and nothing else mattered now. Because Tony failed and, maybe, that's all he'd ever be. A failure.

Peter woke up to a dimly lit room. His hands were shackled with a pair of handcuffs, his back against a cold beam. He couldn't keep his eyes open fully, something in his system making him feel weak.

Looking around, he took in the place. The door was painted a deep red and Peter remembered it as the same red on the logo. In fact, he saw the familiar print of the octopus (he wasn't sure if that was what they were going for, but he just assumed) all over the walls. The room was oddly clean for people like HYDRA. He imagined it to be like a run down basement, somewhere where

nobody could walk into. The light flickered through the room, and Peter remembered back to the moment he was taken.

He wasn't sure how long he had been here, but he knew that, hopefully, someone would come and help him soon. He didn't know how long he could take something like this. Something so terrible. Would he get killed? Were they going to experiment on him? Whatever they'd do to him, he couldn't handle it.

He struggled in the hold, whimpering when he couldn't get away from the pole. Whatever was holding him back, he couldn't get out of them. Usually his super strength would help, but whatever they put in him, or even what these handcuffs were made out of, was suppressing it.

There wasn't anyone else in the room with him, but Peter could hear the sound of people's heartbeats. He looked at door, knowing they were probably there. Just waiting.

Looking down at his leg, Peter finally noticed the gash in his thigh. And then, only then, did he notice that he was dressed in clothes he didn't recognise. Black and red shorts, with a top and a jacket over his torso (that also stung a bit too). It looked a bit like a uniform, if a usual uniform looked like a child trying to dress up like a hallmark-super hero. If Peter wasn't terrified for his life, he'd be laughing at the ridiculousness of it all.

"Fuck," Peter cried, the pain still burning around his handcuffs.

He let out a tear. He felt powerless, like he had many times throughout his life. He'd been powerless a lot in the past fourteen years, Peter realised. When he lost his parents, he couldn't do a thing. When Ben died, he froze up and failed to help him. And, now, he couldn't help himself. Proposed superhero, but he couldn't even get away. Captain America did it, so why couldn't he? He was just... weak.

As his mind continued to poison his thoughts, two people dressed in lab coats walked into the room where he was held. They looked at him, smirked, and put a gun to his head as they walked over. Peter looked up, the barrel of the weapon making him shiver. This wasn't good.

"Hello, Spider-man," the man on the left said, "We've been watching you for a while."

"So I've noticed," Peter replied, trying his best not to sound terrified. But, he was. He was so scared. "May I ask why?"

"You are talented, boy," The other said, and this one's accent wasn't like the other's. It had a twang of Russian in it, and a bit of American. He must've been over here for a while. "We like talent. We like to have talent with us."

"I don't want to work for you," Peter replied, trying his best not to move, just in case his captors didn't like it.

"Oh, I think you do," the left man smirked, "Or we'll go back to your apartment and take your Aunt. Or maybe we'll go after 'Miss Potts'. Take your pick, Peter. Work for us, or we'll kill all of your family."

Peter stayed silent. He locked eyes with one of them, slowly nodding. Nothing hurt more than imagining losing more of his family. He couldn't do that to them. He couldn't do that himself. So, he had to comply. Comply until he could get out.

The barrel of the gun was lowered. Peter took a breath that he didn't know he was holding, before one of the agents took off the handcuffs. Instead, a disc was placed onto his neck. They pressed a

button on a remote, showing what this could do. It gave him a tough electric shock, hurting Peter so much that tears fell without his permission.

“Crying already? There’s going to be more where that came from, Peter. I’d toughen up, if that was you.” One of the scientists said (he didn’t know either of their names, so he tried to think of nicknames. He decided against it. He didn’t want to make fun of his situation).

The second guy laughed, but Peter couldn’t recall what was funny. The hand wrapped around Peter’s muscle, probably causing bruises around it as he did. And suddenly, he was escorted out of the room he had just been aquatinted with.

The hallway was just as clean as the room he was just in. People walked past them, looking straight at Peter with proud smiles. Peter tried to keep his head down, but as he did the disc released an electric shock in his neck.

This must’ve been the longest hallway Peter had ever seen. The colour of the walls and the floor reminded him, eerily, of a hospital. But, this? This was the furthest thing from such a place (from what Peter remembered). Peter knew hospitals were places of recovery, of groups of people working together to selflessly save other’s lives. They are places of new life, creating people’s happiest memories for one when another leaves the world in a different room down the hall. Nothing like that happened here. It was just darkness, no room for happiness at all.

Iron Man would come for him. It was the first person he could think of coming through that door. Tony saved him when he was only eight-years-old, he had faith in the man that he could do it again. And when he did, the first thing he wanted to do was tell him he was sorry. That he should’ve never been horrible to him, that he deserved everything he had. And, most of all? That he had always, and will always, be Peter Parker’s hero.

Peter was taken to another red door, one that looked a lot like the one he was just in. A hand crept up to his neck, squeezing it. Peter shivered, wanting nothing more than to be home.

“Welcome,” someone else said, walking down the hallway. His lab coat followed him, almost like a cape. It wasn’t white, like the other men with him. It was a darker colour, both black and red (just like the logo).

Peter couldn’t reply. He just stared, trying to make himself feel numb about what was happening around him.

The black and red lab coat guy opened the new door, grinning widely at Peter. There was something behind his eyes that scared Peter. It looked like excitement and, maybe, just a little bit of hope.

“We’d like you to meet someone, Peter...” he said, before pushing the terrified teenager inside.

It had only been ten hours from the moment Tony found out Peter was missing. He was working tirelessly, just trying to find HYDRA to get this kid back. He tried tracking the Spiderman suit, but that was a dead end. The chip showed him Peter’s house. It was, most likely, stuffed into the back of his bedroom somewhere. Tony hadn’t slept, he just couldn’t. Not when Peter was out there, terrified.

It wasn’t until Steve Rogers came down, concerned etched into the lines on his face, that he broke down again. He took one look at the ‘puppy-dog’ eye look, before the tears poured out of him like a waterfall. Steve was obviously confused, leaping forward to take Tony into a hug. The billionaire let himself break on Steve’s shoulder, crying harder than he ever had before. His throat hurt from

how hard he was sobbing, almost becoming dehydrated from how much liquid he was losing. Sharp gasps filled the room, Steve trying his hardest to console a man he hadn't seen shed a tear before.

"Tony?" Steve asked, still rubbing his back. "What's wrong? It's okay- I-,"

"I'm sorry," Tony gasped, shaking in Steve's grip. "I'm so sorry, sorry-," he repeated. His words ran out of his mouth, with zero variety. It was just a constant stream of 'i'm sorry', which just scared Steve even more. "I'm so, so, sorry."

Steve pulled back, putting his two hands firmly on Tony's shoulders. He waited until the shorter man was looking up, before he spoke again. "Tell me, Tony. You're scaring me. I promise I won't be mad."

"They took him," Tony cried, biting his lip to try and stop himself from sobbing. It didn't work. "Peter. They took him, Steve, just- out of his apartment- like it was nothing," he watched Steve's concern turn into something like anger. It scared him. He thought that anger was directed at him. "I'm so sorry- I didn't- I was trying to make sure he was safe. I'm a fuck up, Cap. I don't-,"

Steve stopped him by taking him back into another hug. It shocked Tony into silence. He tucked his head into the side of Steve's neck, just letting himself be held and comforted.

Steve was Howard Stark's friend, back in the day. The man was something like Tony, but also the complete opposite. Both Tony and Howard were the smartest people in the room, commanding the attention of a group by a single word. But, Howard was harsh. Steve started to see the attitude cracking through before he crashed into the ice. From what he heard, that attitude/hate only grew and he definitely took that out on his son. Steve could see the way it affected his friend, from how he repressed his emotions and hid away from any sort of compliments. And, now? Steve couldn't call Howard his friend. He could only call him 'an acquaintance' at most.

"I don't blame you, Tony," Steve whispered, knowing how badly the man needed to hear it. "Not at all. Whoever took him, that's who's fault it is. And we will get him back. We're the Avengers, okay? Do you know who took him?"

Tony nodded, waiting until the second hug was over. He looked down to the floor, not wanting to remain eye contact. He knew he wasn't, but he felt weak for breaking down. Howard always would yell at him for that, conditioning Tony to never want to do it again.

"HYDRA," Tony said, "It was HYDRA, Steve. I don't know how long they've been looking for him, but I noticed the logo in some surveillance footage when I was originally trying to find out Spiderman's identity. So, it's either some Neo-Nazis trying to imitate their work, or they're back."

Tony only looked up when Steve went quiet. When he did, he saw the hurt and pain behind the super soldier's eyes. Steve's hands clenched, obviously trying to calm himself down. They both knew why.

Steve had a history with the organisation. He thought he had taken them down in the past, but apparently they were back online. Flashes of memories came into his head, taking him back to the time where he was around people he missed.

His Bucky... oh, if he could see him again. Just to say 'I love you', because they never did. Both of them were too scared to be caught, or shunned. They knew it, but life was different then. But, now? If Bucky Barnes was still alive, there was nothing that would hold Steve back (well, nothing he could think of). But, he wasn't. He'd never get the chance to see him again.

“Steve?” Tony said, breaking him out of his trance. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah,” Steve said, sounding like he had been punched in the gut. “Just gave me an even bigger reason to get him back, didn’t you?”

Telling the rest of the team what happened was hard. All of them broke at the news, angry and terrified for their youngest Avenger (not just their teammate, but someone apart of their family).

The depression spell hit all of them like a truck. Tony spent more and more time in his lab, searching desperately for any news. He only ate when Rhodey or Pepper made him, and Steve could see how skinny the hero was getting. It was horrid to see, but nobody had the energy to help. Not when they were all struggling just as much.

Loki was hit hardly with it, immediately retreating back to his room. He didn’t come out for hours after the news, or even days. He didn’t eat, or shower. Peter was the first, par his brother, to treat him like an equal. The first person to show him any sort of kindness. Thor tried to help him, but he was so sad himself that his efforts were futile. They stayed in their room and mourned him as if he was gone, scared of how they could go on without him.

Clint went home to spend some time with his family, missing his little prank buddy. He helped in the effort to find Peter from his house, but he couldn’t find anything. Frustrated, he spent most of his time shooting arrows at a target in his garden (just trying to get the frustration out of him). His kids helped, of course, but knowing someone so precious had been taken by an organisation so evil was heart breaking.

Natasha wasn’t seen for a few days. They all assumed she was out looking for Peter, but nobody was sure. When she did return, she let herself relax into a hug from Steve. It was a similar scene to what happened with Tony. Someone who hardly cried, breaking down in his arms. But, he didn’t care. Crying wasn’t weak. He cried all the time, and he made sure both of them knew it.

Bruce read over some of his notes with Peter, smiling down at them. Weirdly (or he, at first, thought it was) he’d put something Peter made in the boy’s designated chair. He’d slip a plate full of food in front of the robot, or little origami bird, and pretend Peter was sat there with him. And if he shed a tear whilst he did, nobody ever mentioned it.

Pepper and Tony had grown distanced since the kidnapping. Neither could suppress the feeling of fear whenever they spoke about the teenager. It had caused multiple arguments, as both of them couldn’t figure out how to process what they were feeling. Tony couldn’t tell her how he really cared for the boy, pretending that it didn’t bother him as much. But when he’d leave the room, he’d go straight back to the lab and cry. He wouldn’t even bother with turning the lights on. He’d sit, shake, and scream at his robots to be quiet. If he opened the liquor cabinet that he hid down his lab, he didn’t tell anyone. Especially as he downed his second bottle of vodka for the night.

Tony’s nightmares, from which he has probably had since he was only five, got worse. He dreamt of Peter, of how alone he was. How scared he must’ve been feeling. And the fear resonated in Tony. He knew what it felt like to be so scared when he was younger. He’d tell Jarvis that his one goal in life was to help the world be peaceful and happy. For the first half of his life, he failed to do that. Now? He thought he was finally honouring the man Jarvis wanted him to be. But he couldn’t even keep a teenager safe.

One night, they tried their best to properly talk it through. Pepper had walked in their bedroom with her hair tied into a loose bun, her eye bags darker than Tony had seen before. She didn’t look at him as she got under the covers, turning her back away from him.

"Pepper," Tony said, putting the tablet he had been using down on the bedside table. "Pepper, just look at me. Please."

"Fine!" She replied, turning around. She sat up, looking at him with a tired look. "I'm looking. What do you want?"

"Would you stop?" Tony said, shaking his head. "I'm trying, Pep. I know this is hard for us, but-,"

"For us?" Pepper stressed, "Tony, you've been telling me constantly how you're not bothered about him. He's my baby boy, Tones. I've known him since he was eight. He's like the son I never had."

Tony looked down to the bed, his gut telling him just to tell her. Tell her that he cared for the boy, the same way that she did. "I-", he started, before taking her hand for strength. "I know, Pepper. And I'm sorry I haven't been truthful to you."

"Truthful?"

"Pepper, I care for him. So much," Tony finally admitted, trying his best to keep eye contact with the woman. "I, uh, I know I should- sorry, I just- okay, um. Let me start again," Tony took one deep breath, offering a small smile to his partner. "I don't know for how long, but Peter has, um, he might have just knocked down the walls around my heart."

Pepper sighed. She wanted to be happy about what he just said. Hearing that the two most important boys in her life got along was amazing. But, knowing Tony had been lying to her about it (making her upset and annoyed for however long Pete had been missing) and that Peter wasn't even around to confirm it, it hurt her more than she thought. Bittersweet would be the word she used to describe how it made her feel.

"I'm sorry, Pepper," Tony told her, his voice quiet and damaged. "I was so scared."

Tony's admission made her heart swell. Her anger started to bubble away, once she properly listened into the concern of her boyfriend's voice. Wrapping an arm around his waist, she leant her head against his shoulder. "He'll come home and then you can finally tell him that he's not the devil you thought he was."

Tony reciprocated the intimacy, leaning into her touch. He gently laughed at her statement, before playfully shaking his head. "Oh no. Pep, I still think he's the devil. Just.. a tolerable one."

"Oh, of course," Pepper laughed, as if it was the most obvious statement in the world.

Steve wondered down to Tony's lab one evening, after the topic of parenthood came up at the Avenger's dinner (after they spoke greatly of Peter Parker, all of them praying for him. Even if they did not believe in anything). Tony's face had paled, immediately leaving his dinner plate on the dining room table. He went down to the lab, ignoring everyone's calls for him to come back.

"Please, just leave me alone," Tony said, but he allowed Steve access in. That meant, to Steve, that he needed help, but he just didn't want to admit it.

"I don't think I will," Steve said, softly.

"Steve-please," Tony sighed, once again looking at the robot Peter made.

"Can I ask you something?" Steve said, walking just a little closer to where Tony was stood.

He half-expected Tony to make a joke, to tell him that he already did. But, he didn't do that. He just nodded, not taking his gaze away from the machine in his hands. It was weird to see him like this and it stung a little, knowing that Tony was this affected by a kid he 'didn't even like' (in his words).

"Why did you go? Also, why do you care so much for Pete? I know we all love him, but you never really showed that you cared.. so..."

"I didn't expect that many questions, Capsicle," Tony mumbled. Putting the robot back down, he turned his body's to Steve to talk to him. "Got the most daddy issues out of all us, Steve. My father wasn't the.. well, he wasn't nice. That's saying it lightly. So, I saw this kid that needed a father figure and he, well, he didn't even glance at me.. but then we started getting closer and I could see myself becoming that person in his life. And as soon as I let myself be happy, something comes and snatches him up. And it's my fault."

"It's not your fault, Tony," Steve whispered, trying to put a comforting hand on his upper arm. Tony immediately flinched back.

There was a small period of silence, until Tony filled it up again. His voice cracked as he spoke. "All I ever wanted was to be like you. That's all my father wanted, too. Did you know that your is 'greatest creation?' He never gave a crap about me, because of you and your stupid legacy."

Steve was a bit taken back, but he refused to be offended. He knew that it was just the anger and the loss that was making him act up like that, not anything to do with how he actually felt. He stopped Tony from sitting down, making sure the man was looking into his eyes. Tony started crying, trying to punch Steve's arm to keep him away. But Steve knew how badly Tony just needed an emotional display of affection, like a hug. As soon as his arms embraced the man, Tony immediately stopped trashing about. He let himself relax, cheek pressed up against Steve's chest.

"You are enough, not matter what he told you. Tony, you'll be a great father figure to Pete. And we'll get him back, okay? You'll be so much better than your dad. He's not my friend. You are."

And when the rest of the Avengers came down to the lab, FRIDAY let them in. They took one look at Tony in Steve's arms and immediately walked up to join the group hug. They stayed like that for ten minutes, secretly wishing that Peter might feel their embrace. None of them would stop until Peter Parker was back home, or until Tony Stark believed in how brilliant he was.

Back to the day just after Peter's kidnapping, fear was now the only emotion Peter was feeling, as the scientists pushed him into a room with somebody he didn't know. Whoever it was, they couldn't contain their excitement.

The figure had a stocky build, from what Peter could see. He had long, greasy, black hair that cascaded just over his shoulders. When Peter looked into his eyes, he had this feeling of familiarity. He wasn't sure why, but it was still there in his head. The rest of his face was obscured by a black face mask, making this person a lot scarier than most of his captors.

But there he was, just sat there behind some bars. A lot of scientists walked in, before shutting the door behind them. Every single person in the room watched as Peter was pushed into the cell.

Whispers echoed through the halls and Peter could hear them. He caught wind of conversations such as: 'unstable, yet obedient', or 'dangerous to put the kid in there'. All of them made Peter more and more nervous about his experience here.

Peter's heart was, most likely, beating at a record speed. The door of the cell closed and, then, it

was just him and ‘scary man’ (he thought this person deserved a nickname, although he wasn’t sure why). ‘Scary man’ didn’t move, until a familiar disc shocked him. He grumbled something, gently moving his eyes onto Peter. It was in that moment that he realised this was another captive, someone in the same position as he was (albeit, in a very different uniform). ‘Scary man’, suddenly wasn’t so scary. Way to judge a book by its cover...

Peter’s own eyes narrowed, trying his best to recoil his memory. Who’s eyes did they belong to? And why did Peter seem to have such a distinct memory about them?

“Well don’t be rude, Winter,” the weird lab-coat guy sighed, addressing his new friend (even though the man hadn’t said anything, Peter knew they’d get along), “Introduce yourself, wouldn’t you?”

When the mask came down, Peter knew. That was Bucky Barnes, alive and well. He knew that those eyes were familiar. He’d spent hours with Mr Rogers, just letting him talk about Bucky. He’d lost count the amount of time he’d seen his drawings in Captain America’s sketchbook. One thing he knew was that Steve saw Bucky die. So for him to be alive at the same time Steve woke up in, was nothing short of a coincidence... maybe they were soulmates.

“Mr Barnes?” Peter said, forgetting where he was. When all the agents jumped up, fear in their faces, he realised he said the wrong thing. When he was shot with some sort of tranquillising dart, Peter let the unconsciousness embrace him. They didn’t account on him personally, sort of, knowing who their captive was.

Suck that, HYRDA.

And, then, he fell asleep.

# The Spider And The Winter Soldier

## Chapter Notes

Eeee, I really enjoyed writing this chapter! I hope you all enjoy it too! Thank you for the continued support:)

Tw- torture (involving water) and a lot of violence

When Bucky Barnes, or ‘Winter’ (that’s what he thought his name was) fell from the train, he had been terrified. He fell, slowly watching somebody’s face come out of view. He didn’t know who the person was, but he remembered the panic on their face. They called for somebody and Winter wasn’t sure who ‘Bucky’ actually was. He remembered falling, silently, just knowing that he was about to find out what death felt like.

But, he didn’t.

Bucky didn’t die. Instead, he was dragged by some scientists through the mountains. He remembered the feeling of numbness, his eyes not able to fully open. All he could see was the rotting vegetation, forgotten about during the winter months. The side of his face dragged across the snow, but Bucky wasn’t sure if he could feel it.

And when he was awake again, Bucky was sat up and strapped up in a mechanical chair. He couldn’t feel his left arm (he didn’t know it then, but it was already gone). There was a syringe in his leg, putting something in his system. And, then, he was frozen. Until they needed him again.

For years, he was frozen and taken out over and over again. He killed a bunch of people, not knowing what he was doing. All he did was abide by commands, becoming more of a machine than a man. Then, once again, he was frozen.

Bucky wasn’t even sure of the year, when the wide eyed teenager was thrown into his cell. He watched the kid’s wide eyes, just wondering if this was the next person he was assigned to kill. But, no. They told him, once the kid was knocked out, that they’d hired a new ‘teammate’ for him. His name was the ‘Spider’. Bucky wasn’t sure why he was a spider, but he definitely knew that something wasn’t right. This boy was just a child.

And, something he said made him re-think his entire situation. He’d heard of a ‘Mr Barnes’ before. The memory was something locked away in his mind, a memory that had been taken away from him when everything else was wiped. Every bad memory he ever had, had been wiped (he wasn’t sure if wanted those back). What he did want, however, was to know who he was before now. Was he born here, or was he taken? He really wasn’t sure. But, Mr Barnes? There was something there, but he just didn’t know.

After the kid was knocked out, Bucky watched as he was dragged away. He sat close to the bars of his cell, a lot closer than normal, and let his eyes track the Spider as they took him out of the room. Oh well, everyone here died. It was wishful thinking to hold onto the hope that held have someone else with him. The kid was just the latest, and most unfortunate one. He wondered when his time would come around.

But, then, he heard something. The serum his ‘captors’ injected him with made him more alert. Stronger. A weapon. He could hear things that were miles away, just like how loud the boy from before cried and screamed. He didn’t know what they were doing to him, but he could imagine that it wasn’t good. They were never nice to him, either.

Peter woke up in a smaller room. His eyes blinked open, and a man looked directly back at him. His arms were detained, his legs too. He felt like he couldn’t breathe, and he wasn’t sure if he still was. Maybe he was dead and he was in hell, because it was his fault why Uncle Ben was dead. He knew that he’d end up here. But, no. That was wishful thinking. Because this was real. Incredibly real.

“You didn’t say you knew who Bucky Barnes was,” a different scientist said, brushing hair out of Peter’s face (just like Pepper Potts would do). Peter shivered, trying to get away from his hand. He was shocked in return. “Come on, Petey. We can’t have people telling him who he is. He’s HYDRA’s best asset.”

“I wasn’t aware that I’d see him here. In fact, I was under the impression that he was dead,” Peter replied, trying his best to act like himself. “He has people out there who love him.”

“We don’t care,” the scientist spat, slapping Peter across the face with a head-turning slap. “Don’t speak of the outside again, Peter. Unless somebody asks you. You’re here now. There is not ‘an outside’ anymore.”

Peter’s cheek burnt. The feeling of getting slapped without an opportunity to fight back was humiliating. He bit his lip, trying to distract the heat of the pain to somewhere else. He looked up at the man, keeping silent.

Suddenly someone was behind him, tugging at his hair. They pulled his head back so he was looking up at the ceiling, putting something up to the exposed flesh. He shut his eyes, terrified about what was going to happen. They injected some more serum into him, making him tired.

A helmet, or something like it, was put over his head when they let go of his hair. Peter automatically struggled in the grip, his body moving around without his permission. They pressed a button on the nearby machine, doing something with his head. It didn’t hurt, but he wasn’t sure what was happening to him. He was so scared that he managed to burst his hands out from the chair. He wrapped a hand around the closest scientist’s neck, trying to get him away from him. When he knocked them out, he tried to get out of the door. But, of course, the disc on his neck buzzed him and brought him down to the floor.

He was still awake this time when they dragged him down the hallway, but the buzz from the disc paralysed him. They pulled him by his feet, not caring about the pain building up on his cheek.

They lifted him up to a water tank and Peter’s heart dropped. He struggled, once more, but he was too weak. They dipped his head underwater and he didn’t know if they would ever pull him back up. They did, only to let him take one breath. Before he could have another thought, he was pushed back down into the tank. And again.

And again.

And again, until he throwing up. His whole body felt like it was full. There was water everywhere. In his lungs, his chest, his eyes and his nose. Everywhere he looked, there was water.

They still did it, even as he cried and begged for them to stop. One of them held him there for almost a minute and Peter was sure that he was about to die.

Peter was in that room for 3 hours. Being dipped in water wasn't the only thing they did to him. After the first hour, they pulled him to the other side and hung him up on the ceiling by his hands. They hit him, telling him off and punishing him for being disobedient. Peter knew he wouldn't do it again, if this was what came after it.

He screamed as they punished him. It hurt too much to keep it back. He felt blood all over him, dripping gently down his body. He closed his eyes, trying to imagine that he was back with Tony and Pepper far away from this.

When they finally finished, they released his hands from his cuffs and didn't catch him as he fell to his knees. He groaned in pain, wrapping an arm around his chest. It hurt so much, but he knew that he'd get zero relief for it.

"P-Please let me go home," Peter whimpered, trying to sit up. He was pushed right back down with a foot.

He felt humiliated and weak as they laughed at him, pushing him down over and over again. And, as they were done with him, they dragged him back towards the room with Mr Barnes (with a warning to not let anything else loose about the man's previous life).

He landed with a bang, his body hitting the side of Bucky's as they threw him like a bag of sugar. Bucky didn't spare a glance at him as he landed, looking forward with the same blank stare he had when Peter first walked in.

But Peter knew something was behind him, just begging to come out. He'd save Bucky and take him back to Steve, easily. He just had to get his strength back. Bucky, however, didn't look so sure. He turned to Peter with a frown, glancing over the wounds the scientists had just made on him. When he only nodded, Peter felt something like fear in his gut.

"Hello," Peter finally said, edging just a little closer to Bucky. He knew that he wanted to feel something, to remind himself of home, but Bucky didn't look as receptive. The man leant away from the teenager, just looking. It was a little creepy. "Uh, I'm- Pet-," before Peter could finish his name, the disc on his neck buzzed. He groaned, taking a deep breath. "Apparently not, uh... I'm Spider, something. Whatever they call me."

Bucky remained silent. Peter understood, really. He wasn't sure if he'd want to speak to a random kid after however long he had been in captivity for. He glanced over at one of the guards, who's hands were glued to the gun he had. Peter gulped. He hadn't been this up and close with a gun for this long before. Terrifying, really. When he finally stopped staring at the weapon, he glanced back at Bucky who's gaze was now focused on him. A little closer than he was before, which definitely made Peter jump a little.

"Woah!" Peter said, with a bit of a laugh. "You frightened me, Mr Winter, sir." As he fell back, one of the many wounds on his stomach burnt, making him wince. When Bucky's face fell, he felt like he immediately needed to reassure him. "I've definitely had worse, sir. It's nothing to worry about, and it definitely wasn't because you scared me that it hurt!"

"You talk a lot," Bucky said, and his voice was very different to what Peter thought it would be.

Bucky's voice was like rubbing sandpaper on the side of a table. But, of course, in a good way. It felt familiar, like Peter was back in class making a wooden box (in which he decorated for Uncle Ben, with a lot of different love hearts all over it). It was tough, telling Peter all he needed to know. He hadn't talked in a while, not a lot of people wanting anything to do with him. Peter was certain that he was about to change that.

"I do. People say that," Peter nodded, "In fact, some people say that it's endearing. I'm not so sure, but it's nice to hear. I mean, who doesn't want to hear that their defining quality is endearing? I sure do."

"I sure don't mind," Bucky said, his Brooklyn accent slipping out.

Peter watched his face as he spoke, imagining Steve was sat there with them. Steve, at times, also slipped into the same drawl when he'd let himself relax. Peter wouldn't mention it, but he'd secretly start to smile. He was just honoured that he got to hear the great Captain America away from the press. And, now? He was honoured that he got to sit with a war hero, the man that his good friend loved so much.

"Well," Peter said, looking towards the floor with a small grin. "That's good, then. Very good. Because I really do it all the time. Even after- all of that, which, wow," Peter turned his attention onto the guard. "You guys really go all out, don't you?"

Bucky winced as soon as Peter mentioned the torture (it really was the only way to describe it). Peter immediately felt guilty, shutting his mouth before he could say much more. But he had never been someone that loved awkward silence, so it only took a minute or so for him to continue his rant.

"So, uh, they're a bit creepy, huh?" Peter said, crossing his legs, trying to find somewhere that would give him an ounce of comfort.

Bucky didn't answer.

"Yeah, I thought so too," Peter mumbled under his breath.

When the door opened to the room, Peter's heart rate spiked. In a way, he realised he was developing a 'pavlovian' response of fear to the sound of loud noises. His head flinched up, to see (what Peter thought was) the top scientist from earlier walk in.

"Ready for your first session, Spider?" He said, in a creepy way that Peter only heard from deranged criminals on his favourite documentaries.

"My first session? So, uh, that wasn't a 'session' before?" Peter answered back, immediately regretting doing so when his response was an electric shock. "Guess not." And another.

"No," The man remarked, shaking his head. "Spider, that's what we call a 'punishment' for misbehaviour. But, don't worry. I'm sure we can stop you from rebelling soon."

"I'm not sur-," Peter tried, but was shocked again. His body went limp as it did, making Peter want to start crying. Again.

"What was that?" The man, who he was beginning to address as Mr Octopus in his head, smiled.

Peter said nothing.

"Brilliant," Dr Octopus mocked, leering over Peter like a piece of prey.

He got Peter out of the cell, holding him up from underneath his armpits. It reminded Peter too much of how Tony held him, the day he found out about Spider-man. He'd give anything to just be back at the tower, arguing with Tony like that was the biggest problem he had.

He was dragged down the hallway, for the second time that night. He tried not to think about it, but

he could hear the noise of people screaming down the halls. He wasn't sure what he was about to walk, or get dragged, into.

The chair from earlier was in the middle of the room, illuminated by a soft glow from a lone spotlight. Peter thought it was, just a little, dramatic, but he didn't dare to say a word about it.

He was forced to sit down, the restraints immediately pressed around him. He didn't struggle this time, knowing there was just no point. They placed a helmet on his head and flipped a switch. Suddenly, something was against his head, buzzing. And, then, he couldn't remember the name of... who was it?

Just like that, Peter was losing everyone he had ever loved. All over again. Just in a different way than before. But when they took the helmet off, he still knew his name and who he missed.

Memories he cherished all of his life slipped away. Tony's laugh, Pepper's embrace, May's cooking (although, perhaps, that was something he could lose. Even if it always made him feel warm and cared for. She always did try her best) and Ben's death. He was thankful for the last one, but... he wasn't at the same time. As much as he'd beg to forget what it looked like to watch his Uncle drift away, it was what made him into the person he was before HYDRA took him.

So, day after day, Peter was put back into the chair. The chair became the thing he was used to. Taking painful memories away, albeit he knew that worse things were coming. The chair made him lose his family (the one thing that was keeping him holding on).

And then, exactly one week since his first time in 'the chair', Peter/Spider couldn't remember his name. Perfect. He was ready to be out in the field, ready to kill. The perfect little soldier, just ready for destruction. Perfectly sculpted into the man they needed him to be.

Spider and Winter sat together most hours of the day as they awaited a new assignment. When they weren't on call, they'd get frozen in time side by side. And when they were finally given something to do? It was chaos.

Spider's first mission was to shadow Winter to take down a local scientist. They knew too much about HYDRA's human research program and, therefore, they needed him to be eliminated.

Peter, before HYDRA, had never killed anyone. Spider, however, had. He was terrified, knowing something was weird about what was going on. But that didn't matter. HYDRA's words, it's conditioning, took over the pushing thought in the back of his brain. And, later, he watched this man's face lose the light behind his eyes as he drifted away. Winter did not seem bothered, so Spider just followed him home and tried not to think about the human they had just left behind.

The other soldier, Winter, took to his assignment like a fish to water. He was graceful in the way that he battled, looking like he was engaged in a dance with the victim. He made Spider kill their main target, showing him what to do as if murder was something they'd teach classes for. Though, Spider wouldn't put it past HYDRA to do something like that.

Winter was a pariah in HYDRA's ranks. They didn't seem to treat him like a captive, apart from the cell, but, he was nothing like one of their many colleagues. Spider wasn't sure what to think of him, but his eyes? Something about those kept a tiny bit of Peter in the back of his head... whoever Peter was. Every now and then he'd have a flashback of a blonde man holding a book. Winter's eyes would be on the paper he was holding, just looking, and Spider would remember feeling happy, yet sad, when he watched them. He'd also remember a man, looking down at him in a wonderful room with blue holograms surrounding them. His beard was funny, but his gaze was warm. He didn't know this person was, but he knew that, maybe, they'd come for Spider. One day.

And when they did get back to HYDRA, they recognised the lost look in Spider's eyes. He was taken back into the 'chair', trigger words being implemented into his brain. 'Homecoming', 'Seventeen', 'Daybreak', and the rest, the same as 'Winter' had. With just a mumble of those words, Spider forgot all about the man he had just strangled and became obedient to whomever gave him a command.

Once, Spider failed. His first solo mission was to take out a politician who's father was one of the many soldiers that took out the original HYDRA programs. Spider, when he swung towards them, stopped in the middle of the street. This small second of time meant that the target was able to escape, immediately noticing the assassin's weapons. Police tried to catch him, but Spider was able to get away. But when he got to HYDRA, they were not happy.

He spent hours in the chair, and then he was taken to the punishment room. He was forced to battle some of the younger agents, killing them to show he had it in him. He, then, was shocked over and over again in the neck until he couldn't move. And after he went limp, he was forced into the water tank. This went on for so long, that Spider was scared this would last forever.

His captives, no his 'family' (as they said, but Spider had a thought that nobody treated their family like this), laughed as he tried to get away. They shouted at him to be quiet as he cried and screamed, trying to get him to be more like Winter. But, Spider? He was nothing like Winter. He hadn't been here for long, he couldn't kill people like they had nothing to go back to.

The scientists told him that they'd change that. Spider, in a split second decision, saw an opening. He grabbed one of the scientists, killed them, and tried to run. But it didn't work. They just shocked him until he fell, easily dragging him back to the cell with Winter.

His captors, family, didn't look upset that he had just killed one of their colleagues. In fact, he was sure that he saw a flash of pride in Dr Octopus' face. He heard whispers that the person was 'expendable' anyway. Spider kicked and hit as they dragged him, but as soon as they whispered 'homecoming' (his main trigger word) in his ear, he was alert and out like a light.

After a long, and harsh, ten hours, Spider was taken back into the Winter's cell. Spider immediately climbed the walls of the room, sitting on-top of the ceiling. It was comfort. It blocked him from the main security feed, letting him take a breath away from prying eyes. Winter watched him, a little bit of awe in the way that he observed. Spider wasn't sure why, but his cheeks were wet as he watched. Nothing was making sense.

Sometimes Spider longed to be put into the 'freeze', just so he didn't have to sit and ponder about what was next to come. He'd walk over the walls, again and again, to waste time. Winter, however, would sit in the same place when he ate, when he slept, or when he was just doing nothing. It was creepy. Spider assumed he'd been here for a long, long time. He wasn't sure if he'd be able to do the same.

When they came to put him in the chair, again, Spider knew what they were looking for. He pretended to not remember a thing, staring into space just like Winter did. When they asked him questions about his old life, unknowingly just telling him more things about what he wanted to know, he'd answer like a real, conditioned, hydra agent would. He was going to win by playing the game. And this time, he wasn't punished. He was rewarded by a trip to the outside for just a second or two.

When he looked at the horizon of the outdoors, Spider longed for someone to see him. Someone like the man in his head, the one with the weird beard. He imagined him running down the grass, taking out the guards as he did. They'd go and get Winter, taking him back to the blonde man (Spider wasn't so sure why that was so important, but, deep down, he knew it was). And life would

be back to normal, even if he wasn't so sure on what 'normal' even looked like.

And when they finally put him back in the cell, Winter was there. Once again, he sat in the same spot and stared. It was scary. Spider decided that, maybe, it might be a good idea to strike up conversation with the other person. He sat closer than normal to him, trying to get the body heat of someone who wasn't going to hurt him. Hopefully.

"Hello," Spider said, and he hadn't heard his own voice in a while.

It was deeper than before, sounding a bit like... he couldn't remember what he was trying to think of. It was just gone from his mind. He looked over at Winter, who didn't respond. He just sat there.

Spider decided to try again another day.

After spending an hour on the chair, Spider was thrown into the cell again. Over and over again. Day after day. Spider was beginning to lose the grip he had on the small memories, that were not clear in the first place. Over and over. Every single time he'd come back, Winter wouldn't spare a glance. Silence. Chair. Everything. Spider was going crazy, he didn't know what to do.

Spider wasn't sure how long he had been in captivity (two months. Tony Stark had been counting every day, back in the Avenger's tower), but it was beginning to feel like he wasn't coming back.

Maybe the heroes he dreamt for didn't exist. Because, why would anyone come and save him? He wasn't worth looking for. The Spider was a murderer, an asset for a company that killed for no reason at all. He couldn't be redeemed. This was it. He'd be here until someone killed him, or he died from old age. He assumed getting killed was more likely, however.

When Spider was put into the cell this time, he didn't say hello. He didn't climb on the ceiling to get comfortable. He didn't move from his spot. He sat and stared at the clean, black and red walls for every hour they kept him awake. They had turned him into the second Winter Soldier, ready to attack anyone they wanted at the whisper of a word.

In Winter's head, unaware from the outside world, was thousands of memories trying to make their way back to him. He didn't change how he acted, knowing what HYDRA could do if they found out. But something about 'Mr Barnes' was trying to tell himself something. The kid speaking to him reminded him of someone else. He remembered blue eyes, closing just before the other person leant in. He felt a tingling sensation on his lips as a memory of someone holding him came back to him. But, he wasn't sure what to do about it.

He'd watch the kid get thrown into the cell every single day. He wouldn't move his head, but his eyes would track the scientists as they walked away. He'd try not to react when the Spider crawled over the walls (he understood the name now). Because, in his head, he was trying to plan a way for the both of them to get out. He knew that once the agents said their words, it would be hard for them to disobey. Somehow, however, Winter had something he didn't know he still had. Hope.

Hope was a fickle thing, even when you're a super soldier assassin locked in a warehouse with evil scientists. It was hard to remain focused on believing that getting out was an option, but Buck-Winter knew that he just had to keep believing.

He'd get there, eventually, and when he did, the little Spider was coming with him. Because the boy had given him the best present he could think of. He helped him remember, for the first time in a long, long, time (74 years, Steve Rogers had kept count since he tried to take his lover's hand as he fell from the train).

When the sun set and the guards swapped over, Bucky Barnes looked over at a child soldier and snapped out of seven decades of HYDRA conditioning (even if the small moment only lasted a minute or so). And when he was himself, he looked at Peter (that's what they called him originally) and smiled.

"Hello," he said, starting a conversation for the very first time.

# The Bank Heist

## Chapter Notes

Tw- gun violence + torture

When Bucky said “hello”, he tried his hardest to communicate with the Spider. But every single time he replied, they’d take the Spider away and Bucky would hear nothing but screaming. Screaming that resounded off the cell walls. And Bucky would try not to listen. He’d try SO hard to just focus on the blonde guy in his dreams and memories, but still... nothing would work.

Little Spider would return, just scared to glance at him. He looked skinnier, like they hadn’t been feeding him the amount he really needed. So, sometimes, Bucky would slip a piece onto the kid’s plate (making sure nobody from HYDRA noticed it).

The kid’s skinny frame reminded him of someone. Surely it couldn’t be that blonde person from the train? He was far too built to have ever looked like that. He shook that feeling away, deciding to focus on making sure this child was okay. No matter how much danger it put him in.

But the kid wasn’t getting any heavier. Perhaps he needed more? So, Bucky gave him more. He had to do something. There was just something inside him that had to help those who needed it. He wasn’t so sure why.

Spider just wasn’t the same person that he was when he first got there. He wasn’t bubbly, outspoken or talkative. He had been suppressed in the dreaded ‘helmet’. Bucky was sure that they must’ve used it a lot. The bruises were in the same place the helmet would’ve been in. It hurt, even if he wasn’t one hundred percent sure why he cared so, damn, much. He just needed to stay as Bucky, rather than ‘Winter’ for everything to be okay.

Six months later...

Bucky and Spider were given the next big mission, a week after one of Spider’s successful solo ‘adventures’. Bucky hadn’t been out in the field since his memories had started to come back, so he was incredibly nervous for what was about to happen. He didn’t want to hear the trigger words, knowing it could probably undo what he was thinking.

Spider was given a new uniform for his missions. His Spider-man suit looked like it had been dipped into a black dye. They tried to make it look as different to the superhero costume as they could, for a lot of different reasons. Spider-man was a popular person, so people would recognise it if he suddenly came back. There was also the issue of the unrelenting Avengers, who would probably try everything to get their precious asset. Or, even, there was the risk that Spider would recognise it and would revert back to Peter. They couldn’t have that. No, not when he was just a perfect like solider.

Bucky’s outfit remained the same. The black mask over his face, smudged black eyeshadow to camouflage his eyes. They’d leave his hair, greasy, to the side of his face, long and annoying as it reached his shoulders. They armed him with the most advanced gun they had, strapping it to his side. A bunch of pocket knives slipped into his back-pocket, just for some backup. He tried his best not to look at it all, pretending like he was ready for the mission.

This mission, however, was the biggest Spider had been on. Bucky knew that he couldn't let the kid go through with this, even if he didn't understand the full gravity of it. But, he just knew.

Their task was to sneak into one of the most popular banks in New York, to take as much money as they could. HYDRA was running out of funds, even though they'd never admit that. No matter what they had to do to get to it, they just needed to get as much as possible (and kill any witnesses in their way). Bucky decided that he wasn't going to let anyone die, knowing the eventual guilt complex it could cause.

Both of them were forced onto a helicopter, taking them towards the mission. Bucky stared over at Spider, who's hand was tapping his leg (Bucky assumed he was trying to calm himself down). Nobody said a thing in the vehicle, making the awkwardness of the ride only increase. But Bucky knew how these things went, they'd eventually be out and away from the agents. Maybe they'd even have the opportunity to run away instead. Bucky could easily rip the kid's disc off, away from any prying eyes that could shock them.

But, just as Bucky felt the most free he had been all his life, they said their trigger words. Winter stood alert as they did, snapping his glance away from the kid. So much so for being a new person. HYDRA would always have a grip on him, he quickly came to realise.

The helicopter landed miles away from the location in a desolate field of grass, so that nobody could see HYDRA fly in. The two soldiers jumped out, grabbing their weapons as they did. The helicopter then flew away, making it final.

Spider and the Winter Solider walked together, not saying a word. They stepped forward in sync, both of them having deep conditioning in their heads to perform heinous acts, especially the one they were headed towards.

Spider swung to the top of buildings, using a grappling hook to help Winter get up. They leapt from rooftop to rooftop, until they were stood on-top of New York's most prolific bank. This was it, there was no going back now.

Using a laser, the two cut into the roof and dropped approximately forty feet. They landed in a pile of terrified customers, all of them rushing out of the room when they saw the two men with guns. Spider went to shoot some of them, but Winter somehow pushed him away. Neither were sure why.

Walking straight past the armed guards, incapacitating them whilst they did, both Winter and Spider easily made their way down to where most of the money was held. Using a specially crafted bomb, the safe was blown to pieces. They stuffed as much money as they could into multiple duffle bags, refusing to pay attention to the, now injured, people around them.

Witnesses described the scene as something out of a John Wick movie, relentless and bloody. Or perhaps they said it was the scene in the Matrix, where Neo dodged all of the bullets that came his way. Because not one bullet hit the two intruders, both of them moving at such a fast speed that it was hard to keep track of. In fact, the bullets bounced off surfaces and came dangerously close to hitting others around them.

Security guards tried to fight back. But they were not good enough for the two enhanced humans. Spider kicked and punched, taking down every single person that opposed them. Winter helped too, making way for them to get out safely.

Spider was aggressive, performing just like HYDRA wanted him to do. He was perfect puppet, being pulled at the strings by some of the most evil people on planet earth. But, to people who still

knew him as Peter, there was a twinge of his past life inside him. He'd mutter funny quips at the people he passed, even if that preceded a violent act. He'd be overly optimistic, telling Winter (in the rare moments where they could talk) that they'd conquer the world. Winter wasn't too sure he could agree.

By now, not one customer was still around. Plenty injured people scattered the marble floor, but neither soldier cared to attend to their wounds. When armed forces came in, shooting at them both, Winter decided that their escape plan needed to happen now.

Another bomb went off that the two placed, creating a puff of smoke so that they could get away unannounced. Their plan worked, getting them out of there before anybody could stop them. When the smoke cleared, it was like the two had just magically teleported away. To everyone around them, it was just terrifying to watch.

From roof, to the safe, and then back to the helicopter only took an hour or so. They put the duffle bags in the arms of the HYDRA employee, jumping in the back of the helicopter as they did.

Neither said a word as they flew back.

Their effort was displayed over every news channel across America. No casualties, so far, but a lot of people got injured. Nobody was certain who was behind the act, but speculation was wild across the globe...

In the midst of Midtown, students gathered around each other as they watched the breaking news unfold on Flash Thompson's phone screen. Students from all walks of life, from every clique group, watched, in disbelief of the events. The news was reporting this as a bank heist and for a bunch of teenagers, this was the coolest (yet upsetting for the victims) thing to happen for a long time.

They gossiped for the entirety of lunch, all of them wondering what evil could do such a thing. To almost kill hundreds of people, just for some money. There was the odd student that knew someone in the attack, so there was a lot of grief counsellors spread around the school's campus. It wasn't odd to walk into someone who was shedding tears.

Ned Leeds, who was sat a few tables away with MJ, also had his phone out to see the news. He couldn't shake the familiarity of the smaller perpetrator, but he pushed that aside for now. He glanced over to the empty spot of their table, just hoping that Peter Parker would come back one day.

It had been eight months without his best friend. They had already started Sophomore year without him, and he had missed his fifteen birthday (they were supposed to throw a Star Wars theme party). All that May told him was that he had been taken and Ned could only assume it was something to do with Spider-man. He tried to hack into the suit's cameras, but all he saw was Peter training with Tony. Which was cool, but it didn't show him any clues of where he could be now.

Ned missed him, more than anything in the world. He couldn't function without him. Every single moment, in which something funny would happen, Peter would usually be by his side. Just ready to say something. And now, nothing. He felt as if he was slipping, losing one of the only things he cared for.

MJ, although she tried to hide it, was a good friend and someone he emotionally leant on. When people taunted him in the halls, saying that Peter had obviously died (or horrible words about him), she'd be quick to defend him. She was the only person, par his loving family, that was currently keeping him sane.

And this attack? Ned knew Peter would be appalled. They'd spend hours together in Ned's room, just speaking about the events that had unfolded. They'd have some stupid, deep, conversation that would turn into a Star Wars debate in under a minute or so.

Ned walked aimlessly down the school hallways as the day came to a close. His eyes froze on one of the school doors. It was a Thursday, so usually he'd meet Peter out of this class at the end of the day. They'd speak about their last period, walking home together. Sometimes Ned would get to be his guy in the chair for the evening.

He looked down at his hands, rough and calloused for his age. He worked so much with tech that they had little marks all over them, but they still didn't come close to the wounds that Peter had.

Ned first saw one of his bruises a week or so after his Uncle died, just above his hipbone. They were having a sleepover, of course, and Peter took his shirt off and must've forgotten about what it was hiding. Ned remembered he was insistent that he was okay. But, he must've lied. Because Peter wasn't okay. He was gone, leaving Ned all by himself. He'd trade everything he owned just to see his friend one more time.

Before he could control it, Ned ended up breaking down in the middle of his school. He quickly wiped his tears, hearing someone calling his name. He assumed it was Flash, so he tried to get away as quickly as he could. But, it wasn't. Suddenly, Johnny Storm (most popular kid in the school, who totally fancied Peter) was blocking his way. And, weirdly enough, he also seemed to be in the same amount of distress as Ned was.

"Johnny?" Ned said, pulling his sleeve forward to wipe away some of his tears. "Uh, what's up?"

"Uh, so, you're Peter's best friend. Right?" He said, looking over Ned's shoulder to see if anyone else in the room. There wasn't. When Ned nodded as a response, Johnny sighed. "Ok, so, there's been a rumour going on that Pete's, um, either in dead or in trouble and, I, uh, was just wondering if he's just moved? Or if you've heard from him at all?"

Ned shared the familiar sentiment of fear and loss about Peter, obviously. He looked at Johnny's face, concerned, and decided to tell him the truth. Well, part of it. He wouldn't tell him about Spider-man for two reasons. One, they wouldn't believe him anyway. Two, that was Peter's secret to tell and he was a good best friend.

"He was, um, taken," Ned told him, shoving his hands in his jacket's pockets. "Just- out of his own living room. I don't where he is, or if he's even alive. I just really, really hope he is."

Johnny's face fell. "Oh," he said, putting it very eloquently. "That's not- I don't, uh, I didn't expect you to say that," his words were small, almost unbelieving of what Ned said.

Ned could tell how much Johnny was freaking out, but he could also see that the other boy didn't want to breakdown in front of him. Ned noticed the tears bubbling in his eyes, so he knew that he should eventually try and stray away from the topic. As much as he wanted to keep Peter's legacy 'alive', even if he was still alive out there, he didn't want to cry again. He already did too much of that recently.

"I didn't think I'd hear it, honestly. His Aunt told me about it. But, I, uh, I think- I don't really want to, um- sorry," Ned sighed.

"It's okay," Johnny said, pulling Ned into a hug.

Ned froze. He closed his eyes as Johnny held him. He let himself cry. He missed Peter so much.

Too much. He needed him back, now. He needed him back for himself, for Johnny, for MJ and for everyone else. Peter was just so good. Better than everyone else in the world. He just could never hurt a fly.

"Should we just go somewhere and talk about him? I don't know, maybe that can make us feel better," Johnny asked, to which Ned complied with, simultaneously sniffing as he tried to stop the tears.

They went and sat in the school's fields, choosing a small bench in the corner. "So, what do you want to know?" Ned told him, "Because I know a lot. We've been best friends since we were like five years old."

"I just- did he even mention me?" Johnny asked, looking nervous. It was the most nervous that he'd ever seen Johnny Storm. Well, in front of Ned anyway. "Because, well, uh- I'm not sure why- I just..."

"He did. Of course he did," Ned smiled, "Why? Do you... like him? Because I've definitely noticed some... stuff... between you two. And I'm just saying, I definitely ship it!"

Johnny let out a little laugh, barely loud enough to be audible. He looked to the bench, with a little smirk on his face. That smirk on his face told Ned everything he needed to know. Something definitely happened between those two, something that Peter didn't even get to tell him about before he was taken.

"That's a yes, huh?" Ned smiled softly, feeling a weird feeling of pride in his gut when Johnny nodded.

"We kissed two times," Johnny admitted, "I just- I wanted more. I wanted to ask him out on a date, but he just disappeared."

"I'm sure that he'll be back soon. Peter's always, always, been the most resilient person I know. For all we know, the kidnapper might've taken him to the Caribbean. He could be living the high life right now."

"I sure hope so," Johnny replied.

Across the city, in Tony Stark's penthouse, the Avengers sat around a table and talked about the latest event that just happened. Steve's face was downtrodden, as he tried to think about how they didn't get there in time. They were all suited up, in all different forms of uniform.

Tony lead the meeting, for the first time in a long time. His usual pep had left him, way too focused on his kid to think about the disaster (however bad it might be). They went over their tactics if this ever had to happen again. Hopefully, they'd manage to get there much faster.

"Don't you think the smaller one looks a bit like Peter?" Tony said, pointing to the video from the bank's CCTV footage. "Look- it's in the way he moves. That's him, I swear." The rest of the team looked at him as if he was crazy, with a twinge of pity. Tony's shoulders fell as he realised they didn't believe him. "That's him. Come on, look! It's obvious."

"Tony..." Natasha started to say, a soft voice that rarely came out.

"No," Tony shook his head, whilst telling FRIDAY to turn the video off. "Don't 'Tony' me. That's my Pete. That's him. I'm going to find him and prove it to you all, because that is my-," Tony stopped himself. He turned around from the group, leaving them all alone.

He'd prove them wrong.

Tony couldn't get it out of his head that one of the two perps looked weirdly familiar. The same build of his Pete, the same way of moving of his Pete. His Pete. He'd never said that before. Peter wasn't his kid, he was the furthest from his. Peter hated him, actively telling him how much he didn't want him around. But that thought still wasn't pushing. It was there, telling him to check it out. To see if that was a lead.

But, he didn't. Riddled with guilt and mourning, he didn't have the energy to move from where he was sat. He just watched as the rest of the team drafted a plan for how they'd address the press, whilst he nursed a bottle of rum. Being drunk made it all numb, so he didn't have to think about it.

Steve took once glance over at him, sighing. He walked over to the man, taking the bottle of rum in his hand. He immediately took it to the kitchen, pouring the liquid down the sink. Tony wasn't so happy about this decision, trying to grab it back from Steve's hands.

He didn't care for how pitiful the group was, staring him like he was the most fragile piece of ancient glass. Steve's hand was underneath his armpits, lifting him away from everything. Tony shifted in his grip, trying his best to get out. But, Captain America was a super soldier who was a lot stronger than Tony Stark.

"Tony, come on," Steve said. "Enough, okay? That's it."

Tony teared up, but none of them fell. He let Steve take him up to his bedroom, putting him on top of the bed beside Pepper. Pepper shared a glance with him, both of them silently communicating between a glance.

"Is he okay?" Natasha asked, as soon as Steve came back downstairs.

"No, I don't think so," Steve said, shaking his head with a frown. "But, he'll get there. And we will too. As soon as we can help everyone out from the bank, every piece of energy can be placed on finding Peter."

When Winter was sat in the helicopter, the affect of the trigger words was slowly dropping. He could feel something, like a memory, slipping back into his head. It hurt, feeling the same bad memories over and over again. If someone wanted him to know who he was, he just wished they gave him the full story.

His head was like a 1000-piece puzzle. It's possible to put back together, but if someone only have the patience to do so. But, also, it meant that it was fragile. It couldn't handle this. Knowing something and then, immediately, not. It wasn't something he enjoyed. But, for now, his head was back to Bucky. That's who he was. Wasn't it?

Bucky and Spider were back in their cell, after just stealing thousands of dollars from a bank. It wasn't the usual mission Bucky went on, but apparently they needed supervision for Spider. Neither of them had been washed, blood and dust all over their bodies from the impact of the bomb. Spider just looked... so little, which did something to Bucky's heart. He watched him, taking his little wrist in his hand to check him over. Something which, apparently, the guards took notice of.

They took one look at Bucky and realised that something was definitely wrong here. They ripped Bucky away from the Spider's grip, taking the super soldier towards the 'chair' for the first time in about seventy years. Bucky struggled, as they pressed him into the constraints. He closed his eyes, trying not to think about what was about to happen to him. He tried to shut off those memories

from when he first got captured, but some of them had remained consistent.

The helmet was put over his head. The helmet he dreaded to see ever again. He tired so, so, hard to keep hold of the recent memories he had. But the helmet was too painful, draining everything away from him with no permission. Bucky, the person he used to be, was leaving him and there was nothing he could about it. Nothing at all. Again.

And when they were finished, they weren't satisfied. They tortured the memories out of him, for hours. He became a shell of the person he used to be. Week after week, over and over again, he was back in the helmet.

Meanwhile, they sent Spider out on mission after mission. He killed people, with no remorse. He didn't get close to being caught, taking out all of his victims out like a flash. HYDRA was so impressed with him, because he was turning into their new little asset that was just as good as their most successful invention, the Winter Solider.

Winter was retuned to his cell later, with no memories in his brain. He sat, in the same place in which he always did, with the same blank stare.

When Spider returned, he did the same. And neither of them spoke. Again. They sat there, dirty from the effects of the bomb and frozen in fear. And neither of them could remember who they were before, broken. And they had no idea that people were out there who loved them.

The cycle just repeated. Both Spider and Winter did their missions, returned to the cell, sometimes tortured, or even just frozen until they were needed again.

But when Spider messed up one of their missions, they were not happy. He hadn't got to the target, which meant they were able to escape. It was a good thing Spider wore a mask, they told him, otherwise authorities could have caught wind of their operation. Spider was forced to undergo some training, with Winter as his trainer.

They put both of their captives into a ring, forcing them to head-to-head with the other. Winter struck first, kicking out Spider's knees. The smallest soldier tumbled down to the dirty, marble floor. His cheek hit the cold material, probably leaving a mark behind as it did.

Spider immediately jumped up. He stepped back, balancing his weight on his left foot. Throwing a punch with the right hand, his body curved as he leapt towards the other man. But, Winter was still too quick. He blocked his fist with his own arm, pushing back against Spider. Spider's mouth bled, but he couldn't feel it. He got right back up, again, to try and make HYRDA proud.

If he didn't put more power into his punches, he knew he would be in trouble. Winter took a few steps towards him, making him back up. His back hit the wall and Winter didn't stop. But Spider saw an opening. He jumped up, climbed the wall and he was able to get behind him in an instant. He kicked in the back of the man's leg and just began to punch him.

The Spider got cocky. He kept punching and kicking, until Winter looked like he couldn't take anymore. He stepped back, happy and proud that he won. But Winter wasn't done. He was able to get up, wrapping his legs around Spider's neck. He remembered teaching this move to a lot of people, when HYDRA sent him to the Red Room, and he hoped that Spider would want to use it once. He had the ability to do it. He took Spider down, cringing when HYDRA shocked the little one for a punishment.

They made the two do this again, and again. Spider only won a few times, but he was getting a lot better. Winter was proud of his progress (although he wasn't sure how/why he was feeling like

that), but HYDRA didn't share that same sentiment.

When Spider got to 10 wins, the two soldiers were approached during their lunch. They were both sat in their cells, broken plates on their laps, when the lead scientist walked in. He glanced over them, staring widely at the bruises and marks over their bodies. He seemed to enjoy their marks.

Spider blinked up at him, trying to figure out who was speaking. His whole body ached, making him want to just go home... but, he didn't know where that was. He closed his eyes and imagined a place. When he looked down to his hands, he noticed the marks over them. Something in those marks did something to his head...

Fred? Uh, no that wasn't it. Something like that. He knew it. Ned. That was it. Ned Leeds. He remembered him. His best friend. But, he wasn't sure why he remembered him so much. He didn't remember where they met, where they lived, or what he looked like. However, he knew these marks. He'd work for hours with this person, making stuff to show to the other's. Although Ned was nothing but a silhouette, there was just something about him.

A wave of euphoria waved through him. He was getting his memories back. What was his name? What was it... he tried to make it come back into his head. He looked over at Winter, whose face was staring at the scientists. He looked into Bucky's eyes, as he felt a pull to him. There was something in those eyes that were a window to the outside world. He couldn't explain it, but he just knew it to be true.

The pain of exhaustion, starvation and wounds made him feel dizzy. But as he blinked, flashes of someone came to his head. In fact, he started to see a lot of people. One blonde man had a book in his hands, flipping through the pages. The other was a brunette with a weird shaped beard, who had a bunch of machines with him. A long haired blonde man, who always seemed to be with another long haired man. A woman and two other short haired men. There was just so many faces, that he couldn't keep up with them. He knew that they all cared for him, somehow. In the way that they smiled at him in these visions, there was definitely something there.

The brunette with the funny beard... he was the one that would save him. He felt it. Tony? Was that what his name was? No, surely not. Whoever it was, that was the one face that kept coming up more than once. Was this his father? An Uncle? He just didn't know.

But, he couldn't think about that now. Not when... Dr Octopus (he thought that's what it was, anyway) was looking at him with the weird toothy grin.

Spider sighed when the man spoke. He wanted to say something, to run past him through the door. He'd take Winter along with him. Maybe they'd find their own house together.

"We've got a new assignment for you, boys," Dr Octopus said, snapping Spider out of everything he was thinking about.

And what was that? They had to kill the 'Avengers', whoever they were.

## Battle The Ones You Love

### Chapter Notes

Tw- torture + violence

When Dr Octopus told them to kill the Avengers, neither Spider or Winter cared to ask who they were. Because when he said the words, they couldn't do anything but be obedient. They were shown pictures of the people and Spider was sure that he knew one of those people, or all. Maybe they wanted them gone...because they had wronged him. Whatever the reason was, he said that they needed them out of the way. And Winter and Spider were the best people to do it.

They trained for hours a day, food and water a forgotten topic. Winter tried to show Spider how to effectively use his powers, to which he worked well with. Dr Octopus seemed impressed, as he watched from the sidelines.

But when Spider collapsed from exhaustion, he woke up from a splash of ice cold water in his face. The disc, that was still there on his neck, electrocuted him when he was pulled up from the tub. He realised that the doctor was not happy with attempts, using torture to try and get it through to him that he needed him to be better. When Spider thought they were done, they discarded him onto the cold floor.

"Spider, these people are not the same people you've been up against before. These are enhanced individuals, you can't be complacent," he told him, the heel of his foot up against the Spider's ribs. "Come on, Spider. Look at me, now."

Spider barely managed to open his eyes. He blinked slowly, until he managed to look up at the man who was pinning him down. He couldn't speak, knowing his voice would just break if he did. He just stared, making his body feel numb.

"Tsk, tsk, Spider. I need to hear you answer me," Dr said, leaning closer to the man on the floor. He tugged his hair up, with his left arm, making Peter stare right into his eyes. He pulled at the hair, but Spider didn't flinch. Dr seemed to be impressed with this, after the giant smile grew over his face. "Come on now. How hard are you going to work?"

"As hard as I can," Spider replied. That, apparently, was the wrong answer. He was slapped around the face as a response. "No, I mean- I will succeed. I will kill the Avengers."

"That you will, my little soldier. We're all so proud of you. You've done so well here," He grinned, before pulling him up and taking him back to Winter.

When the guards and scientists left, finally letting Winter and Spider spend some time alone. Winter, although he wasn't too sure why, immediately leant over to him and took his hand. He needed to look after the little one. He needed to make he was okay. Because little Spider looked at him, sometimes, as if he knew what was behind his eyes. Spider looked shocked, but he leant into the hold. He just needed warmth, and Winter provided it.

But for just a second, Winter transformed into the man with the funny beard. The other man's chest glowed a light blue. But it wasn't scary, it made him want to stay there and sleep in his grip. Or to

cry about everything inside him. He knew this man would let him stay there, if he wanted to. Because funny beard smiled at him like he cared about him (nothing like the Dr did, this smile was actually nice and calming). And Spider's memories of this man slowly started to come back to him, but they couldn't push through.

A soft beeping noise was resonating through his head. It sounded like a robot, like something he had made. Then, the sound of laughter. Somebody's else's laughter. Not his, but an older man. It had to be him, the one with light in his chest. The man he couldn't stop thinking about. The man who he knew, if it wasn't Winter, would break him free.

He just couldn't figure out what to do. So when Winter turned back into himself, he put his head against the soldier's shoulder. He felt the edge of a gun against his hip. It should've made him feel queasy, or scared, but this was Winter. Winter wouldn't hurt him.

So they stayed like that for two hours, just staying still and silent. Until the soldiers walked into the room, pulling them apart. They had uniforms and weapons thrown at them. And, then, it was time to go to the helicopter. They had a mission to do.

Meanwhile, some of the Avengers (Sam Wilson, Tony Stark, Steve Rogers and Natasha Romanoff) were sat together and completely oblivious to how HYDRA was planning to attack them. Tony, who was on a streak of sobriety of two days, was alert. He read over some reports, just trying to find any indication where the organisation might be hiding Peter.

Tony's head was deep into his computer, only slightly listening into the conversation of the other three. He tapped away on the computer, knowing that he must be close. He found the small clip of Peter, from only one security camera, as he was taken. The boy gently went with the soldiers, a terrified look on his face. Tony had never, ever, seen that look on Peter. But, the thing that hurt the most, was when he heard Peter whisper.

"You won't get away with this. Tony will come and get me."

Tony didn't know that the kid had that much trust in him, or for him to be the first person he would think of in a situation such as this. It gave him a sense to work harder. And as he wiped a tear from his cheek, he did just that.

The team noticed him crying, but nobody said a thing. Sam walked just a little closer to him, laying a hand on top of the billionaire's shoulder.

Sam Wilson met Steve Rogers on a morning run. Both of them got along immediately, having the shared experience of war to relate to each other. Sam, as a social worker for vets with PTSD, was probably the first person in the future to fully support Steve. To get him the help he needed.

When Captain America started to attend their group therapy sessions, not one of the other soldiers said anything. Sure, they'd ogle him. But, they were respectful. Because, when he was in that building, it wasn't Captain America. It was just Steve Rogers. Steve Rogers, who had lost so much. Who went through war, an evil organisation and finding himself seventy years in the future. Who lost his soulmate. He was just as damaged at them, but he just had to deal with it all in the spotlight.

Since then, Tony upgraded the wings he used in the war and, suddenly, he became an honorary Avenger. And then, just an Avenger. He became a vital part of the team. It was hard not to imagine their life without him. He was apart of their family.

Sam could see everything building up in Tony's face. The man's face was screwed up. He was

obviously trying to hold back tears. Sam wanted to try and tell him it was okay. However, he was scared. Out of everyone, Tony Stark was probably the one Avenger he was most frightened to meet. It wasn't that he was actually scary. Because, he really wasn't. He was short, grumpy and funny. He was exactly the person he wasn't in the media. He was just the most well known. The 'coolest', the richest and the most 'eccentric'. He just wasn't sure how Tony would react to him.

However, Tony was immediately welcoming. He should not have been scared. Ever. Tony was like a huge teddy bear (which, apparently, he liked to give as gifts). He used his own money to give Sam a whole wing (!) in his tower, furnishing it to his own liking. He made sure his uniform was safe and bulletproof. And he worked on that for hours on end. When Sam asked Steve if he was joining them on their movie night, he had been shocked to learn Tony was making yet another suit. He, nervously, went down to the man's lab to tell him enough was enough. He needed to sleep and eat or, even, socialise with other people. It was how he got the vets to talk, so he assumed it would work on Stark.

But when he went down, his project was open on the screen. A little boy was curled up on the armchair in a room, and Tony was looking over at him with a small smile. Sam didn't know Tony had a kid, but it didn't shock him. The man was almost like the father of the Avengers, anyway. He tried to back out, unnoticed, but Stark was obviously a omniscient being, so he noticed Sam immediately. Calling him back, Sam's heart jumped.

"What's up, birdy?" Tony said, whilst simultaneously brushing hair out of the boy's face.

"I was just wondering- uh-,"

Tony interrupted the man. "Ah, it's right here. Look, my friend, your brand new, sparkling, suit. It's going to be a lot easier to fly, as you probably should get some more speed."

"Tony," Sam said, a bit strictly. "I don't need your suits, man. I mean, they're super cool and all. But, dude, I'd rather you take care of yourself. I was going to ask if you wanted to join us for movie night, but I guess you got some parenting job to do-,"

The billionaire looked, just a little, taken back. "Oh," he mumbled, waving his hand to wipe the hologram away. "I'm not-uh, he's not my kid. In fact, Petey hates me. Well, not so sure if it's 'hate' anymore. I assume it's more of a 'you're okay, but I'd rather be around someone else' kind of thing. And, about your suit- I guess I should probably hold it back a little. Can't make too many, I guess." Tony ranted, biting his bottom lip. He stared at Sam, who stared back, for just a second. "I would come up for movie night, but, uh, kid's asleep. So....,"

Sam just smiled, understanding what might be going on in the man's, big, brain. He nodded slowly, not quite believing that Petey (he guessed that nickname was for the famous 'Peter' he hadn't met yet) didn't love him. The way he unconsciously leant into Tony's hand, or how he slept so soundly in the man's space. It was obvious. But, he didn't think to bring that up. He didn't want Tony to explode. "Okay. You grab some food, yeah? We'll be upstairs if he wakes up." Tony nodded, so Sam turned to walk away.

"Sam?" Tony called, making the man turn around. "Thanks."

Sam Wilson really did feel apart of the family.

So, when he saw the billionaire crying to himself over his computer screen, Sam felt obliged to try and make him feel better. Just something small, just a conversation or two. Just to make sure he was all okay.

But, he couldn't. Something else happened that stopped anyone from speaking.

Friday's security notification went off. Somebody was in the building, or just outside. Somebody with a gun that shouldn't be there. Tony jumped up, quickly asking FRIDAY where they were. And then, all of them were down in the lower levels of the compound where thousands of employees were running from the sound of gun shots.

The gun shots sounded as if they were coming from outside the building. So, that's where the heroes went. In only took a second or two until one of the 'perps' hand's circled Steve's throat. Tony used one of his lasers to blast him off, but he immediately got back up. His gaze was focused on Steve, the rest seemingly an afterthought. It wasn't until Tony moved that he noticed another person staring at the back of his head.

Tony couldn't see his face, but he was frozen. He was looking at Tony, slightly turning his head to the side. As if he was trying to remember who he was. This had to Peter- it had-

But Tony didn't have time to think about it. Because as the person looked over his shoulder to see his friend attacking a national hero, he jumped forward and tried to take Tony down. Now, Tony wasn't 'young' and 'agile' anymore. So, he was damn lucky that he had such an advanced suit. The armour protected him from the nimble person, as they jumped and swung at him. Completely unaware of how much power Tony was holding back on. If this was his kid, he certainly didn't want to cause a permanent injury. So, for now, he was just going to focus on trying to get the mask off his face to confirm his hypothesis.

As they all fought down the street, people stopped in the middle of the road to run as far away as they could. Abandoned cars swarmed the tarmac, all of the owners afraid that a stray gunshot would hit their window screen at an untimely moment. Screams flooded the area, alongside the sound of loud car alarms. And, maybe, the occasional sound of the Falcon's wings, the Widow's bites, Iron man's repulsers and the crash of Cap's shield against a metal arm.

Natasha jumped on-top of the long haired man, wrapping her legs around his throat. She pulled him down with her upper-body strength, flipping the man over as she did. But, he managed to get right back down. This shocked Natasha. She hadn't seen many 'normal people' get up from this move, so she came to a conclusion that these two criminals were definitely enhanced.

Spider was good at hiding in tall places. He jumped onto the top of a roof, unaware that his opponent could easily follow. As they fought, Tony watched Steve and the long haired man on the street. Natasha and Sam were now across the road, helping people evacuate, so it was just those two fighting it out. But, then something happened. Steve hit the man hard enough for him to fall back and as he did... the mask came off.

And then, only then, did Tony hear the strained, devastated, whimper that came out of Steve Roger's mouth. In fact, the billionaire had never seen the Captain so broken.

"Bucky?"

And Tony should've known. He should've seen the similarities. He grew up on enough Captain America comic's to see that the criminal was the Bucky Barnes; it was Steve's best friend, how didn't Tony see? The best friend of the great Steve Rogers, but maybe Tony could see something else there (if he was pointing out the obvious).

But if Bucky was.. Bucky. Then, surely, his guess about Pete wasn't too out of the ordinary. So, as the kid was too focused on his unmasked colleague, Tony reached for the mask and pulled it off. Sure enough, a skinny looking Peter Parker was suddenly glaring at him.

“Peter!” Tony smiled, although he knew it wasn’t going to be as simple as taking his hand for him to come back.

Tony rushed forward to try and hug the boy, stupidly, but he was pushed right back. He couldn’t see what was happening, but he heard Peter jumping down. And when he looked back, Falcon was distracting Bucky from attacking Steve. Then the other soldier took Peter’s hand, running away from them. Tony tried to follow, but his suit malfunctioned from the fight. He laid there, immobile and useless. He failed. Again.

Winter, or Bucky (as, weirdly, familiar blonde man called him), pulled Spider along the stretch of grass that HYDRA had planned to meet them. But, as he heard the sound of the helicopter miles away, he had a change of heart. He looked at the disc on the small man’s neck and pulled it off in one, swift, motion. He did the same to himself, no longer paralysed by fear (or a shock from a guard). And, then, his spilt second choice turned into action. He took Spider’s hand and just ran. Ran as fast, and as far, as he could manage until he found an abandoned house in a village miles away.

Winter, unaware with what he was doing still, easily stole some clothes and some resources from a local shop. When he got back to their house, to which they had just ‘moved’ into, he tucked Peter underneath the flimsy piece of cloth (barely able to call itself a blanket) and gave him some food. He didn’t care about himself, as much, as he knew that the kid needed all he could get.

“Peter?” He tried, hearing the name from the man on the roof. He thought that if he could get one of their memories going, than that would be good enough. When the kid’s eyebrows etched together, tilting his head slightly to the left, Winter assumed he was confused. Well, he couldn’t blame him. He sure was too. “Pe-Peter. I think-“

“He called me that,” Peter said, shivering. He smiled, comfortable, when Bucky pulled him into his side for more warmth, “Are we not going back home? Dr would be very upset.”

“That is.. not our home,” Winter told him, not sure of his own words as he spoke. “He is not a nice man, Peter. He... he hurt us.”

Peter looked down to the floor, slowly taking Bucky’s hand in his (he really needed as much heat as he could find. Plus, it made him feel safe). “Well, thanks for saving me, then. You’re my hero... Bucky.”

Hero? Winter wasn’t so sure about that. And who was Bucky? Blonde man called him that too. Was that his name? He decided he liked it. He was going to be Bucky. He needed to ditch the other name as soon as possible, he didn’t like the connotations it came with. So, Bucky sounded nice. It sounded like... home.

“Bucky?” Peter asked, as the sun set and nobody came looking for them. He couldn’t sleep, too terrified of the Dr holding his head underwater. When the man looked down, he offered him a shy smile. “Are we home now?”

“Yes we are, little one. And we will be okay. I will make sure of it. Nobody shall harm a hair on your head, Peter. Nobody. Not even the man on the roof,” Bucky told him, as he simultaneously made the blanket tighter around the boy’s shoulders. “And if they come for us, they shall die by the soldier they forced me to be.”

Weirdly, the threat of premeditated murder (Bucky thought it was justified, from all he had been through) seemed to calm Peter down. His eyes closed and his head pressed up against the man’s chest. And once Bucky started to hum a lullaby, one he knew he had heard once (although, he

wasn't sure from where), Peter was out like a light.

Meanwhile, in a tower far, far, away, Steve Rogers and Tony Stark were both moping around the living room, tear tracks clear on their faces.

Steve was in disbelief that a man he thought he had lost was still alive. To think that he was out there.. all this time. He imagined waking up to his lover's face, Bucky's hand slowly combing his hair. Being able to kiss him publicly, as if nothing was wrong, was all he ever wanted. To learn that it could be a possibility, if he wasn't brainwashed, broke his heart.

He was just at a loss for words. Bucky had been alive all this time and he hadn't known it. That night, he wasn't sure if slept at all. All he did was sob into the Egyptian-cotton bedsheets.

Tony Stark cried the hardest for a boy he claimed to hate. To be that close and to fail... it killed him. He'd sit with a framed photo of the kid close by, acting suspiciously like a mourning parent. When he met Ted, Ned (?), the kid's best friend, for the first time, all he saw was Peter Parker. They had the same taste, the same smile and, most importantly, the same kindness. Ned, it was definitely Ned, had showed compassion for the hero before he looked upset himself. And as Tony updated him on what they knew, Ned was the one who ended up comforting Tony. Nobody found out, however, as Ned promised he wouldn't say a word (as much as the superhero said it was okay). Ned, apparently, just didn't want to share a moment of vulnerability to the outside world. 'Thank you for helping him, Mr Stark' Ned had said, before leaving all on his own in the lab.

Pepper made it better, however, so Tony felt a sense of guilt for Steve. Because Steve didn't have that type of connection anymore, not without the man who he had mourned. Who he thought he could manage to live without that. Finding out he was alive.. it was like forcing open a previously closed wound. He had his friends, sure, but Tony noticed that he'd eye every couple they walked past. He'd turn his head, pretending like he was fine. But, he wasn't.

The Avengers tried their best, but all Steve did was stare at the photos of them in the museums. He'd hold Bucky's jacket, the one SHIELD gave him when he first woke up, and cry. It really was hard to watch.

And Tony couldn't help, either, not when such an important part of his life was missing. He needed him back for Pepper, who was equally as devastated, and himself.

But, it meant that they just had a better reason to try and find them...

1 month later...

The Avengers had raised about 5 possible HYDRA locations, after Tony had an epiphany on how to track a base (a good scientist never reveals his secrets). Out of the five, only two had agents inside. They shut the organisation down, but still... Bucky and Peter were nowhere to be seen.

With multiple injuries, the team started to get more and more tired, each of them unable to physically fight this much. But they powered through. Every single time. Because if there was a single chance that they could get the boys back, they'd do everything in their power to do.

Tony, working late at night, located the next HYDRA location. He couldn't wait. There was always the chance that they'd learn the Avengers were coming, promptly killing the two captives in the process. They couldn't risk that. So... he immediately woke up the team with an assembling bell. They had work to do and they needed to do it... now.

It took the team two minutes to be suited, all of them climbing into the jet. They held hope that this

would be it. This could be the final one. The one could be where Tony gets his kid and Steve gets his man.

Weirdly, this one was abandoned. But, they kept their weapons up... just in case of an ambush. When there didn't seem to be one, Tony let himself relax. He walked into a room and looked over a cell, which had a keyring n the floor. He realised immediately that this was the little one that Pepper gave him once. He immediately picked it up and shoved it into his pocket with a smile.

This was it- this was-

His hope was destroyed when Natasha and Bruce came out of a room, both of them wearing a worried look on their face. They hacked the system, finding out that the 'assets' were missing. Which was terrifying, but also a relief. But, still, scary. There was a risk for all the civilians, as both of them were unstable and brainwashed. If HYDRA got to them first, there would be havoc. and for the duo themselves? Peter couldn't last long without food. If Tony had to find his kid dead, he wasn't going to bother with anything else. He would... be devastated.

"If I know Buck... he's going to be looking after Pete like he was his child," Steve said, holding his shield just a little bit tighter. "And then.. I'll look after him once we get them back.."

"Steve... you do know that he might not be the Bucky you knew... right?" Natasha said, softly. Carefully too. As much as she would win, she didn't want to see an angry super soldier running her way.

Steve's shoulders slumped. He avoided eye contact with everyone, clearly hurt. "I know.. I know.. but he's still my Bucky. I lov-love him. I always will."

Her hand reached his shoulder, rubbing it gently to try and offer some comfort. He slowly moved over to her, taking her into a hug. He let himself break down, as she reminded him of something he said to her before. "Let it out, Steve. Crying's good. Makes you extra strong."

When Clint eyed Tony, he scowled. "Don't even think about it, Birdbrain," he said, clearly joking around. He even offered the man a little smile.

Then, because Tony Stark was a genius, he had an idea.

"Time to search every crime database in the country. I have a sixth sense that they'll survive on stolen goods. We'll find them," Tony announced, before leaving (whilst taking some interesting HYDRA things he could experiment with) the abandoned warehouse behind.

The team quickly followed, not noticing the scientist with a black and red lab coat. He wore an angry look on his face, knowing that the agents he had transferred to another facility had likely been killed by their team. But, that's not why he was angry. Those men were expendable. What wasn't, however, was his two soldiers. Two soldiers that he couldn't find, that, apparently, failed their mission to kill this stupid, interfering, team. He'd get them back, time would tell.

This facility had been left as it was, as Dr thought the Avengers would have some sort of tech to figure out where the duo was held. He couldn't risk that, but it turned out that he should've. Because, now, he had a lot of dead agents and missing assets. This made him very, very mad. And, perhaps, just a bit vengeful.

Peter woke up in a sweat. His hair was a mess, and very long, from the static of the pillow (the one they had found thrown away). He couldn't breathe, his heart beating so fast that he thought it was going to escape out of his chest. He wore clothes that Bucky had got him. Although it was the first

thing he saw, he thought it must've been fate that the shirt had the funny-bearded man on it.

Iron Man? Huh, that sure was a weird name. Better than ‘weird beard guy’, for sure. But, still. Weird. Bucky went along with, however, as Peter immediately put it on as soon as he saw it. In fact, he looked at it... like it the most important thing in the world. Maybe Bucky would let Iron Man walk through the door, it sounded like (to Bucky) that maybe he was the kid’s father. They did kind of look alike...

Peter ran to the bathroom, looking at his reflection. He just needed to see Iron Man’s face. It wasn’t that Bucky didn’t calm him down, because he definitely did. But, there was something different about ‘Iron Man’. Although, he couldn’t seem to recall something ‘happy’. None of his sparse memories even indicated that they had a good relationship... However, His face made all the bad memories of the Dr seem ancient, because he was there. Unfortunately, the memories were not a long time ago. They were very, very, recent.

It was all up in his head, telling him that he was weak. He couldn’t even look at the bathroom sink, to which water couldn’t even come out of, as he was scared that someone would come up behind him to hold his head underneath the non-existent pool of water. He was delusional, at best. Every noise, or flicker of light, made him flinch. Every time he’d wake up alone, he’d freak out that they took Bucky back. And Bucky- oh Bucky!

He rushed back to the main room when he heard crying, which was then followed with a loud bang. When Peter walked in, Bucky was searching frantically underneath every surface. It was only in that moment that Peter realised Bucky was going through the exact same feelings that he was. When Bucky saw him standing there, he rushed forward and took him into a bone crushing hug.

“Never again,” Bucky whispered.

He didn’t need to elaborate. Peter knew exactly what he was talking about. They had to wait for each other to wake up, or the other would assume they had died (paranoia easily wormed its way into your head after ten months of captivity) or had been taken away. They stayed in a hug for an hour, or so, just revelling that nobody could keep them in captivity anymore. They were free.

Bucky remembered the moment Peter first walked into the facility. He had been all smiles, trying desperately to talk Bucky’s ear off. After the second, or third, time... they electric shocked him and took him away to the helmet. From then on, his shoulders had slumped and his smiles didn’t show up anymore.

The ray of sunshine had dimmed. The boy who was ‘a light’ for him, was now small and destroyed. HYDRA, their ‘holding place’ for so long, had taken his innocence in their hands... tearing it away like it didn’t matter.

He couldn’t believe that a child, too young to be a soldier, managed to undo seventy years of HYDRA conditioning. It may have only lasted a few moments, but for a second Bucky knew who he was. He had memories of his old life, ones that felt so far away. And... the blonde man? Peter helped him remember who he was, so maybe he could help him figure out that mystery.

But, for now, they just had to learn how to survive in the outside world. With nothing but each other, and a few objects they found in the skip, they knew that they’d manage to get through it. And maybe, a team of a ragtag group of people determined to save the world will come after them. And then, if they just had a little bit of faith, they’d remember who they were behind HYDRA’s mind control..



# My Prayer

## Chapter Notes

Tw- brief mention of knife violence

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Peter Parker was stood in the middle of a broken floor, staring outside of the wooden frame. He felt as if someone was coming, as if something was about to happen. He wasn't sure how, or why, but he just knew. Bucky couldn't take him away from where he stood, even if he tried his hardest. So, he let him be.

Bucky was stood in their makeshift kitchen, putting together a salad (which did not offer enough nutrients for either of them). He didn't see how stressed the kid was getting.

Peter saw a group of people walking towards them, all of them dressed in weird, bulky, sets of uniform. And, if he looked close enough, he saw the outline of the man on his t-shirt. The t-shirt he still had over his torso.

He quickly moved from his spot, tugging Bucky's shirt (who was stood around the stolen food) to alert him. Bucky's stance immediately went protective, tucking the teenager underneath his flesh arm. He pulled Peter into a nearby closet, making sure the boy didn't make any noise.

The closet was small, probably close to 3x4 foot, and it was tough for a super soldier and growing kid to fit into the space. Bucky was sit on the floor, Peter almost on top of him as he sat beside him. There was no light, meaning neither of them could see if their hiding space was actually working. But, it had to. They didn't want to be taken again.

Some time ago...

Tony Stark was hunched over one of his many computers, like normal. He kept to his promise of searching through crime databases, spending hours trying to find something that sounded like Bucky or Peter.

It wasn't until he was finally taking a break for lunch, when FRIDAY's voice came through the speakers. She told him that she had flagged a case file up, one which included key words that he told her to look out for. 'Long hair' and 'teenager'. With an annoyed, but hopeful, sigh, Tony put down his sandwich and read through what she sent through to his phone.

And this? It sounded perfect. The location was only a few miles from the compound, meaning Bucky and Peter could've easily ran there after they fought only 3 weeks ago. The description of the 'perps' said something that sounded a lot like them two, with a picture included of the artist's sketch. He could've cried from relief, jumping up to grab the other's.

"Steve?" He shouted, running down to the gym (where FRIDAY said he would be). He stopped in his tracks when he saw the broken punching bag, frowning to himself. "Steve? You okay?"

"Tony... I can't- I mean, he's-", He said, hunched over the floor. When he looked up at the man, his blue eyes were now red. Tears tracks decorated his cheeks, making his distress just a little more

potent. "I need him."

"Well, I've got some very good news," Tony said, "And I'll only tell you... if you make a promise to not kill anymore of my punching bags.." When Steve glared, he quickly tried to retract his statement. "I'm kidding. Um, so, I might have just found them!"

Steve's face turned into a hopeful smile. He jumped up, wiping his tears with the back of his sleeve. "You're not joking?"

"Well- I can't be one hundred percent, but I'm pretty cer-," Tony started, until he was flown into a, very tight, hug. "Oomf- jesus, Steve. Give a man a warning," he smiled, putting his arms around Steve's neck. He let him actually squeeze him, not caring about his fear of physical contact. He put a stop to it when Steve started twirling him around like a figure skater.

When Steve pulled away, Tony felt privileged to be on the other side of his smile. Steve immediately got the pep back in his step, as he pulled the other man towards where all the other Avengers were.

"What's got you so smiley?" Clint asked, wincing when Thor smacked him on the top of his head. "Hey!"

"Cap! It is brilliant to see that your noble smile has returned!" Thor smiled, "It looks very good on you!"

"There's no time to explain," Steve said, unable to wipe the smile of his face, "We all just need to suit up- you can ask questions when we're on the road!"

So, that's how the team ended up finding the two 'soldiers' on the run. Tony spotted the run down building straight away, easily opening the door. They all stepped inside, seeing items all across the wooden floor. It was clear that somebody was staying here and it had to be Bucky and Pete... it just did.

When they couldn't find anyone, they felt defeated. All, but one, of the team stood in a circle in the living as they discussed their next move. That was until they heard a scream from the kitchen.

When Tony rushed in, the scene he found wasn't what he expected. Bucky Barnes was stood with a knife around Clint Barton's neck. Peter was quivering in the corner of the kitchen, his knees up against his chest.

"Hey, ok- woah-,"

Then, as Steve Rogers walked behind him, Bucky's hand seemed to falter. That let Clint take the knife away from him, forcing him to the ground. As he did, Peter started crying and begging for them to leave.

Really, it was just chaos.

"Clint! Get off him!" Steve said, looking between him and the man on the floor. But, he didn't move. He couldn't. Bucky was a danger and Steve knew that, but seeing the person he loved on the floor hurt him.

Bucky was staring up at him, blinking gently. He didn't seem to be hurt, just scared and confused. Peter, on the other hand, was crying so hard that Tony was scared he was going to hurt himself.

Clint got up, pulling Bucky's hands behind his back. He put some special handcuffs over his wrists,

just to ensure he didn't do anything to harm anyone in the team.

Steve froze when Bucky tried to get close to him. The man looked up at him, eyes blinking, as if he was trying to figure out where he had seen him before. Steve put his hand on Bucky's shoulder, gently, and ran his thumb against the exposed flesh.

"Buck-," Steve said, as if he couldn't believe this was happening.

Steve grabbed some dog tags from his pocket, a replica of the one's Bucky wore in the war (they couldn't get the original ones back, as they assumed Hydra got to them first). He placed them around the man's neck, not able to stop himself from giving the man a lovesick smile. Bucky, however, couldn't return the love. But, he was insanely confused why he wasn't scared of the person in front of him (or why he seemed to melt into his touch).

"There, you look beautiful," Steve whispered, as the rest of the Avengers, par Tony (who was trying to calm Peter down), left the room to give them privacy.

"Beautiful?-, " Bucky replied, sounding like he was out of breath. The brief look of love shattered, turning into complete confusion. "I think I know you, b-but... I don't and-,"

"That's okay, Buck," Steve whispered, not able to take his eyes away from the man. He put his hand on Bucky's waist, just like they used to do, and kept it there. "I'm just happy that you're here."

And, as if this moment was fated to be from the stars, then the radio turned on by itself. The sounds came out, loud. Music. Such beautiful music.

It sounded like home. 'My prayer- the Ink Spots' ...and when Steve blinked he was back in a hidden corner of his house in 1940, only months before Bucky got drafted into the war. Or in the 30's, when they knew nothing of the horror that was coming. Bucky's arms around his waist, as they stepped side to side. Dancing together to the slow rhythm, they'd just smile at each other as if they couldn't think of anywhere else to be. Bucky's lips would edge on his, as they loved each other in a forbidden way. But, it was there thing and, wow, it was perfect.

"My prayer is to linger with you  
At the end of the day  
In a dream that's devine  
My prayer is a rapture in blue  
With a world far away  
And your lips close to mine"

The floral wallpaper, which was oh so common, lit Bucky's smile up. Bucky was his flower, the reason why he had so much drive to join the war effort. He didn't want to lose the man he loved so much.

They'd sway side to side, whispering the lyrics into each other's ears in stolen moments. They'd dance to the same song over and over again, ignoring the shouts from random people fighting in the streets.

Bucky would laugh, throwing his head back. Oh, it was the most beautiful smile Steve had ever seen. The sunlight would shine in just the right away, making the man's eyes glitter with love.

"Tonight while our hearts are aglow  
Oh tell me the words that I'm longing to know

My prayer and the answer you give  
May they still be the same  
For as long as we live  
That you'll always be there  
At the end of my prayer”

Everyone around them would dismiss their love if they knew, telling them they were blind to love another man. But if that's what it meant to be blind, Steve would chose to never see. Bucky could be his guiding eyes..

Whenever Bucky would ask if they'd be like this forever, Steve would say “oh, my darling, til the end of the line..,” in a hushed whisper, as their hands explored each other's skin.

Steve would stand on his tiptoes, gently leaning his cheek on Bucky's. He'd listen to Bucky ramble all about how much he loved him. Or, sometimes, they just wouldn't talk.

They'd listen to the song, to each other's heartbeats as they swayed. Everything else in the world would dissipate, as all they needed was each other.

“My prayer is to linger with you  
At the end of each day  
In a dream that's devine  
My prayer is a rapture in blue  
With a world far away  
And your lips close to mine”

Bucky's kiss was all he needed, all he wanted, to feel safe. And every single time he fell asleep, Bucky's body far away in his own bed... a dream would do.

Steve was so, so, alone when the one he loved went away. Everyday he'd sit and wait for news, desperately awaiting news that Bucky Barnes was okay...

And when he cried over the photo of Bucky that the man had printed out for him, he'd complain that the smoke from a cigarette flew into his eyes.

He only accepted the serum, because he knew it was the way he could get to his love.

Nothing changed much when Steve got the serum. When he rescued Bucky, the man had his arms wrapped around him and Steve could barely stop himself from crying. When they'd risk a dance or two in the middle of the woods, they could imagine they were back at home with each other.

All that was different was that Steve lead the dance. He'd be the one who wrapped his arms around Bucky's waist, slowly rocking him back and forth. They got used to it, as they took it in turns to hum the tune to the beautiful song.

“Tonight while our hearts are aglow  
Oh tell me the words that I'm longing to know  
My prayer and the answer you give  
May they still be the same  
For as long as we live  
That you'll always be there  
At the end of my prayer”

And then, Bucky died (or so, he thought). And it killed him. He didn't care anymore. He let the

plane fall, grinning for he fact that he'd be reunited with the one for him. And that they'd be able to love each other forever in the afterlife..

Love was something indescribable. Steve, nor Bucky, never said 'I love you' directly, but they didn't need to. Love was in the way that they sat together (sometimes in silence, just to be near one another), love was when Steve would sneak his hand over to Bucky's in the middle of a crowded movie theatre or love was in the way that they'd do anything for the other. Love was everywhere, if they just elected to go looking for it.

And, loving Bucky? It was the best decision Steve ever made. He fell in love with him over and over again, and nothing had changed now. As he smiled down to Bucky, tears pooled in his eyes as he listened into the radio. And when he saw Bucky struggle at the handcuffs, to try and wrap his arms around Steve in return, he broke. He just let himself start crying, trying to look at Bucky as the man stared at him.

And when Bucky spoke, it just made everything worse.

"Stevie?" He whispered, "It's our song, isn't it?"

Steve looked at the man with a wet smile, nodding over and over again. "Yeah," he said, out of breath from his tears, "Yeah, baby, it is." He never called anyone 'baby' before, but he just couldn't stop himself from letting it slip.

"Oh, that's nice," Bucky whispered, "You're Stevie, my Stevie," he said, trying to lean forward to put his cheek up against Steve's (trying to imitate what they'd do before).

"Of course I am," Steve whispered, gently leaving over to help with what Bucky was trying to do. "I missed you."

"I-," Bucky stuttered, letting his eyes close. "I thought of you. Didn't know it was you-b-but- I, I remember you being a lo-lot smaller."

It hurt that he couldn't remember all their past, but the fact that he could recall his name was brilliant progress. And if they had to rebuild what they had, Steve would do that ten times over. He could fall in love with Bucky Barnes for the rest of his life and whatever came after it. Because this was his soulmate, the person he should be with every second of the day.

Meanwhile, as Bucky and Steve had an emotional moment, Tony was trying to get through to the emotional teenager.

"Petey-," Tony whispered, slowly trying to get close to him. When Bucky screamed at him, Tony jumped out of his skin. He was just protective over the kid, he got it. He knelt down on the floor, just a little bit closer to Peter, but not too close. When he saw the shirt the kid was wearing, he was surprised he hadn't melted onto the floor. "Hey, buddy. Hey, look. It's me. Do you remember?"

Peter quickly shook his head, trying to get further away. But his back was already edging up into the kitchen cabinets. "N-no," he whispered, tears coming out of him like a bad storm.

"That's okay, sweetheart," Tony said, slowly. "It's okay. I'm not going to hurt you, though. Do you know that? You can trust me."

"I can?" Peter said, as the shaking started to slow down. "I-I can," he tried to tell himself, before flinching as Tony got closer.

"Come on, Pete, look at me," Tony said, with just a little of a strict undertone, smiling at him when

he turned his face towards the billionaire. “That’s it, your doing so good. I’m so proud for you, kid. I can’t imagine what you’ve been through, but we’re here to help you now,” Tony tried to explain, whilst simultaneously trying not to be too desperate.

“Help?” Peter whispered, as if it was a foreign concept to him. And when Tony nodded, he let himself walk up to Tony (who had his hand stretched out) like a nervous puppy. He took Tony’s hand, letting the man hold him.

“That’s it, kiddie,” Tony smiled, squeezing his hand to let Peter know he was here. “We’re going home, Petey.”

“Are you my dad?” Peter asked, remembering the ‘memory’ of cuddling up to the ‘Iron Man’ (when, in reality, he was up against Bucky Barnes). “I’m so-sorry I can’t remember you.”

Tony tried not to show how hurt he was, but he knew that the kid saw it. He tried to scramble away, but Tony managed to pull him back. “Look, sweetie- I’m not mad at you. I can see those genius clogs turning. I’m not your dad, no. But my girlfriend is like a surrogate mother to you.”

“Oh, I don’t- I don’t remember her.. I’m sorry,” Peter said, glancing over at Steve and Bucky.

“That’s okay, kid, I didn’t expect you to,” Tony told him, brushing some hair out of his face. And, wow.. was that where he got the memory from? He almost shuddered, like he had when the Dr did it, but something about it felt warm.

Peter tried to grab onto the memories that left him, reaching out for the one he had when they first took him. The memory that Iron Man would be the one to save him. Iron Man, who was also Tony Stark. Mr Stark, the man stood in front of him. The person he knew would save him. He said so, to himself, when he was sat in the dark depths of the cell.

“You saved me,” Peter said, but it was mainly to himself. “I knew you would- I didn’t know who you were.. or maybe, are, but there was a memory of a man and I knew he would come for me. And you did. You’re here. You-,” Peter rambled. However, he cut himself off as he started to cry.

“I’ll always come after you, Peter,” Tony told him, admitting it to himself for the.. well, it wasn’t really the first time. He cared for the kid, a whole bunch, and he wasn’t afraid to show that anymore.

“You will?” Peter cried, “Mr Stark?”

“That’s it, Mr Parker. That’s my name. Well done, buddy. It’s up there. I know it is,” Tony said, breathless. He cried as held Peter’s hand, kissing his knuckles to show him that his dad was here- his... no, not his dad. His weird lab mentor, that was all..

“Mr Stark,” Peter repeated, trusting the waters. He said his name over and over again, letting himself smile as he did. “Mr Stark, it’s you.”

Tony couldn’t do it, he looked away. The kid was so broken. It was killing him. So much.

Peter looked at Tony, wanting to lean forward and hug the man... but he stopped himself. He took his hand away from Tony’s, scared out of his mind. He thought about running, or attacking, but something in his gut stopped him. He jumped when Tony gently put a pair of handcuffs on his hands. He could see how much it pained the man to do it, but he understood. He was dangerous, after all.

Peter’s mind went blank for a second. And then, when his mind caught up to him, he was being

walked down the street, Tony's hand on his lower back to guide him. It felt humiliating. Luckily, not a lot of people were around. If they were, they would've been confused to see the entire team of Avengers walking down the street with two handcuffed people.

When they got inside, Peter was separated from his Bucky. He was put into a locked bedroom, with so much to do around him. But, he didn't care for any of it. Not when Bucky was in another room. He cried out for him, terrified to be somewhere unknown without the person that kept him protected. What if Tony was lying? What if they killed him? He had to get to him. He banged on the door, sobbing uncontrollably.

The team watched them both from CCTV cameras, each of them with differing looks of distress. Both of the previous captives were obviously going through more than they could comprehend. They just didn't know if putting them together made any sense.

After a few minutes, Peter's tears stopped. Tony thought they were making progress, but the blank stare almost hurt more than the tears. He broke, terrified with how much this evil team had torn about the kid they all loved so, damn, much. He was a shell of the kid he used to be. It was like they tore everything that made Peter... well, Peter, away from him.

Tony wiped the back of his tears with his suit jacket, immediately ordering them to put Bucky into the kid's room. And when Peter immediately rushed towards the man, wrapping his arms around him, Tony had to look away... He wasn't jealous, he just... no, he definitely was jealous. He wanted to be the one that brought the kid comfort. He wanted to be the one that little Peter Parker couldn't be separated from.

"Well, uh, I'll be-," Tony waved his hand in the direction of the door, "Down in my lab. Getting drunk, trying to forget this shit ever happened," he said, turning around to leave. Thor blocked the way.

"No, Man of Iron," Thor told him, putting a hand on his arm that, somehow, stopped him from moving an inch. "I shall not let you drink your worries away. We are here for you, as your teammate and friend."

"Thor, please- just," Tony tried, before he was taken into, yet another, hug. This time, however, he let it happen. He let his tears fall, gasping and shaking on a God's shoulder.

He didn't even notice Pepper walk in, but he felt the palm of her hand on his back (so, he assumed she had). They all stayed like that for a while, the only sound in the room being Tony's crying (and the faint sound of Bucky and Peter talking from the CCTV footage).

"You got him back?" Pepper managed to ask, in the midst of her own tears.

"Yeah. We did," Tony nodded, sniffing. "They're home."

Hours later, Tony and Pepper was the last two left in the small room. They watched Peter talk to Bucky, wanting nothing more than to go down and talk to him. They couldn't, however. They needed to make sure they could trust the kid, which they knew they would.

Pepper wasn't saying too much, her eyes focused on the little boy on the screen. Bucky's hand was moving through his hair, humming an old lullaby into his ear. Peter looked content, letting his head fall onto the man's shoulder.

Pepper remembered when Peter first spent the night with her, when May and Ben went on a small trip. He was only nine-years-old, only a year or so from the moment they met. He walked in with

two massive bags, looking up at Pepper as if she was the most interesting person on planet earth. The smile he gave her was addictive and Pepper knew that she'd do anything to look after the little boy. Because Peter was the kindest person on planet earth, innocent and sweet. He didn't even have to say a word for people to swoon. All they had to do was look into those big, brown, eyes and they were put under a spell.

The way he'd speak and mispronounce all his 'r's', or ramble about his latest project (just like Tony did). He'd be enthralled by his own mind, barely realising that he had told her all about this hypothetical 'super robot' before (she didn't mind). He'd build computers, or anything that came to his head, and he'd send her different plans for new StarkTech. It was clear that he'd eventually become 'head designer' or CEO (once she stepped down).

Peter Parker was her son, blood or not. Family didn't end in blood, she knew what that meant since that moment. He'd grab her hand, giggling and pulling her around the room (she didn't share with Tony, just yet). When she gave him a bunch of new toys, he recommended that they could give some of them to other kids in need.

And they did. They ran around the local hospital, depositing a whole bunch of toys into the donation box. Peter's smile had never been bigger.

Because Peter was a saint, a kid that deserved happiness and everything else in the world. Not... this. She couldn't think of what her little boy had been through as it hurt too much. She couldn't imagine him being anything but the happy boy she was used to seeing. Their ray of sunshine, Mr Parker, was now... empty.

When Tony explained to her that it was HYDRA that took him, and that her kid was Spiderman... she didn't know what to think. She hadn't cried once, not feeling anything at all. She couldn't cry until she saw him. So, that's what she did.

She didn't even notice that she had started crying until Tony handed her a tissue from the desk. She wiped away the wetness from her cheeks, taking a deep breath. And Tony took her hand, letting her lean on him. They stayed like that until they fell asleep, upright at the table.

When she finally got to visit the kid, he flew across the room and hid underneath Bucky's arm. Bucky also looked scared, but he made sure that Peter was protected. Every new person they saw scared the duo. Both of them were terrified that the Dr would come back and take them.

Pepper knew not to take it personally. But, still, it did make her heart sting just a little. She turned to look at Tony, who shared the emotional, strained, look.

Even when Tony gave Peter a glass of water, the terror was clear in his face. Tony recognised the fear, handling it himself after Afghanistan. He almost threw up in his mouth, thinking about the type of torture they put Peter through.

"Pep-pepper?" Peter stuttered, after an hour of her just sitting in the room. When her smile grew, nodding enthusiastically, Peter's face seemed to relax (as did Bucky's arm).

He crawled out from where he was sat, acting just like a spider. Pepper would've been a little freaked out if it wasn't her Peter. He put his hand on hers, almost looking like he had reverted back to his eight year old self. "Pepper, where's Uncle Ben and Aunt May?" Peter asked, begging with eyes for Pepper to let him know they were safe.

Pepper didn't let her face move. She knew how to hide her emotions and this was a time to do it. She clenched her left wrist, letting herself smile at the teen. She slowly shook her head, putting a

hand in his hair (it always did calm him down). “Honey, do you not remember?”

“Of course...,” Peter said, slowly. After a few seconds, he shook his head. “But... where are they? Can I see them?”

“Peter....,” Pepper sighed. She took a deep breath, not knowing what to say. She looked into his shattered eyes, turning to walk away out of the room. She couldn’t look him in the eyes, too afraid of how she would break down.

“Pepper? Are you going to get Ben and May?”

Pepper couldn’t reply. All she did was continue walking, until she was out of the room and the door shut behind her. She collapsed against the wall, sinking onto her knees until she buried her head, crying harshly to herself.

“Pep?” Tony said, basically running around the corner. He took her hands, looking into her eyes. “Darling? What’s wrong? Is it Peter?” He asked, squeezing her hands.

“I-I hate it,” She whimpered, trying to stop herself from crying. “It’s not... him, it’s just not Peter anymore...”

“It’s okay, Pep.”

“How is it okay?!” Pepper snapped, scared from how angry she sounded. She sprung to her feet, trying to walk away.. but Tony’s hand grabbed hers and pulled her back. “Tony, leave me alone.”

“Pepper, honey, look at me,” He tried, waiting for her red eyes to blink back at him. “He’s getting his memory back.. just bit by bit. He’ll get there, okay? And if he doesn’t, we can contact Strange. I’m sure he’ll know something about it.”

Pepper nodded a few times, trying to convince herself. She couldn’t, though. Not when Peter’s whole ‘being’ was on the line. She just leant forward, hugging Tony into a tight embrace. Tony reciprocated, tucking his head onto her shoulder. They swung side to side, as the hug lasted just a little longer than usual. He leant forward and kissed her on the cheek, just letting her know that he was there for her. Just like she had been, ever since Pepper walked into his office for that first interview.

Tony had a complicated relationship with Stephen Strange. The doctor was incredibly smart, not quite matching his intelligence (but, who could?), and talented with ‘magic’, but he was also one of the most arrogant people that Tony had ever met. And Tony wasn’t sure if ‘magic’ even existed. He was a firm believer in science and Stephen’s idea of the world wasn’t something that aligned with that.

They first met during one of the many Avengers missions, only a few months after Tony was aquatinted with Peter. When he overheard Tony complaining about the teen, he had just looked him in the eye and told him to watch this space. He didn’t understand it, at first, but now he was starting to see what Strange meant...

He wondered if Strange knew what was going to happen with HYDRA. And if he did? Tony knew he had some choice words to scream at the doctor.. whenever they came in contact again.

It took one, agonising, day for Steve to go in and visit. Bucky immediately walked up to him, taking his hand like they were familiar to the other.

“Wow... Stevie, look at you. You’re so muscular,” He mumbled, “How? You were so- different

before...,”

He asked him that before, Steve noted. But he didn’t mention it. He just over the moon that Bucky even remembered his name.

“I know, darling,” Steve said, letting Bucky sit in his lap (as Peter slept on the other side of him). His hand stroked Peter’s arms, letting him fall asleep. “It’s weird, but you’ll understand it soon enough..”

Tony walked in later that afternoon, sitting down on the comfy mattress that the boys were sharing. Peter noticed the shift in weight, climbing over to curl up into Tony’s lap. Steve and Tony looked each other, sharing familiar smiles. They hoped they could get them both back to normal... but, they couldn’t get too hasty.

They all sat like that for hours, content to just be around each other again. It was good.. not perfect (but, still, good), for a while.

But good things didn’t always last long. In fact, if it was anything to do with the Avengers than nothing ever lasted long.

It was 3am in the morning when it happened. Peter jumped up from his spot, jumping away from Tony (who had fallen asleep alongside them). He looked at the door for a second, until the beeping started. Then, he heard the familiar shout of the Dr. He was terrified, knowing this wouldn’t last long. He was probably waiting for the Avengers to find them, knowing it would be easier to track their movement.

But, as he went to wake up the other three adults in the room, a giant blast went off just outside the bedroom door. And the last thing he saw, as his vision turned black, was the familiar smirk of the Dr (and Peter was definitely sure he saw him mouth ‘great to see you, Spider’).

## Chapter End Notes

<https://youtu.be/h7KJCns5v3g> -The song that Bucky and Steve danced to;)

## Getting Back On Track (Almost)

An explosion was the last thing any of the Avengers would've expected. Peter flew through the area, unaware with what just happened. He closed his eyes as he embraced for impact, wincing when his back hit the wall. Everything was so painful. Red blood dripped down his arm, fresh and bright down the flesh.

It reminded him of a moment he thought he had lost. It was an early into his 'career' as Spiderman. He wasn't 'good' at fighting crime. In fact, he couldn't even be classed as 'adequate'.

It was a cold day, the wind almost blowing him way as he swung through the neighbourhood. Not much had happened, but Peter was enjoying it nonetheless. He smiled underneath the mask, talking to Ned who was in his ear (chattering away about a new sci-fi trailer that they just HAD to watch). It wasn't until the hairs on the back of his neck stood up that he realised this day was going to be anything but normal.

That night, before he knew it, Peter was blown across the pavement. He has heard crying from this house, screaming... this woman was begging for someone to find her. To save her. Peter tried, he tried so hard, but he was too late. The bomb blew up the house, and Peter had to watch it happen.

The mic in his ear burst, meaning he couldn't hear Ned anymore. He wasn't too injured, so he tried to run back in when he got up. It wasn't too late- it wasn't-

It wasn't until he was pulled back by an officer that he knew she died.

Every loud noise, or cry, since then made his whole attitude switch. He'd fall into himself, not knowing how to feel. And now? Being in the blast himself? It didn't hurt him physically (it did, but his mind was too loud for him to feel it), it just made him be in the shoes of the woman he let die. To know how she must've felt in the moment... hurt more than anything physical that could be sent his way.

He was more worried about Tony, even if he couldn't figure out why. He scurried back over, trying his best to combat the pain he was feeling. He threw himself over Tony's body, shaking his shoulders for him to try and wake up.

It wasn't a violent blast, but it seemed to have knocked Tony (the only non-super soldier in the room) unconscious. And when Peter looked up, he saw the Dr. And as he saw the Dr, his vision turned black. 'Great to see you spider', he said. Peter didn't return the sentiment.

He was pulled down tower's hallways. Even if he was passed out, he felt the floor against his cheek. And, suddenly, all of his senses were now taken over by the HYDRA base. All his bad memories that he tried to get rid of... they were trying to push back into his brain (as the rest of them were too). His mind was a cluster, and he didn't have a clue where to look.

The tower was always so clean and fresh. The base, however, might've shared the cleanliness.. but, it definitely didn't have the same smell. He remembered, vividly, that the base smelt like blood, or bodies. Well, it smelt of 'HYDRA', for lack of a better word. The stark difference of the smells had hit him when he first walked in. He liked the tower. Being so different to the place he had almost spent a year in was a blessing. He almost fell free.

Well, until now.

He listened to how the Dr laughed, but he still couldn't see. It was pitch black. The laugh invaded

his ears without his permission. It was the most evil laugh he ever heard and he hated that it was all coming back to him..

When he finally opened his eyes again, Bucky's eyes were wide and staring at him with a fearful look in his eyes. He tried to reach out, desperately, but the Dr was holding Peter up by his collar. Peter was scrambling in his hold, crying for Bucky to come and save him. But, as he did, the man holding him was blasted back from around the corner.

A bloody, exhausted-looking, Tony Stark was stood in the door way with a gauntlet over his wrist. He barely managed to stay up right, an equally injured Steve Rogers helping him up. His face was murderous, glaring at the Dr who had tried to take his kid (again).

But, as soon he shot the gauntlet, he collapsed down to the floor. Peter was terrified, looking backwards and forwards from the Dr to Tony. Bucky urged him to come over to them, so he complied.

The hallway was swarmed with HYDRA agents. Peter, scared for Mr Stark's life, jumped over the man and shielded him from everything that was coming. He squeezed his eyes shut, holding onto the man's bicep as if it was his saving grace. He wasn't sure how long he was there.

The assembling bell went off, getting all the other Avengers down to help. They took charge at the battle, beating and taking down most of the agents. It wasn't hard, they didn't seem too advanced. And... the red haired lady... was it Wanda? Peter wasn't sure if they met before.. but, wow, she sure was powerful.

Wanda and Vision, which used to be Tony's Jarvis, were a couple that Peter had only heard of. Steve told him stories before, if he remembered correctly. She had been through so much, that Peter didn't think it was appropriate to ask.

But, her powers were awesome. The red glow of the blasts flew through the corridor, throwing multiple agents (who were armed) outside of the tower's windows. She moved Peter (and therefore Tony too) out of the way with her mind (!), making sure they were out of the way of the battle. Bucky was now in Steve's arms, who made sure he was far from any agent that could take him back.

They thought it was all over. The sound of the weapons died down, before there was next to no sound at all. But, as Peter let himself stand up, he saw the Dr standing in the doorway with his hand on his bloody leg. He launched himself over to Peter, who easily got the upper hand. He wrapped his hand around the Dr's neck, forcing him up against the wall. He squeezed his neck, probably creating bruises that would last forever.

He stared up at him, murderous. The man looked terrified, but Peter couldn't bring himself to care. As he held him against the wall, his grip caused the man to slowly go up even higher against the dry wall.

"You've ruined everything for me," Peter spat, "I want to kill you, just like you forced me to do to others," he dug his fingertips into the flesh, drawing a bit of blood from it. "I-I have fantasied about doing this. Being in those rooms, I've been thinking it over-,"

"Peter, kid," Steve said, a bit terrified of what he was seeing. "Come on, let the man go. He deserves to be in prison for life. He'll suffer more there."

"No," Peter shook his head. He started to cry and scream as Steve pulled him away. Sam and Natasha made sure the Dr didn't move, wanting nothing more to set the kid on him again when he

began to smirk.

"Let me kill him!" Peter screamed, trying his hardest not to look as the medical team took Tony away. He wasn't sure where he was going, but it just made his fear grow tenfold. "Let me! I swear to god- you st-stupid-,"

"Peter," Steve murmured, his voice stern. "Son, this is not you."

"I don't know the fuck I am! I'm not your son, I'm not any of yours-," Peter shouted, "He kept me in a room for ten months and forced me to kill innocent people! I don't care if it's not who I am, I want him dead!" Peter struggled against Steve's hands, again. When he got free, he stood forward and got to the doctor before Steve could grab him back.

Peter kicked the man in the chest, making him fall down about thirty floors (joining the rest of the agents that Wanda took down before). He didn't care that Steve looked disappointed. In fact, he didn't see much of it. Because as soon as he saw the Doctor hit the floor, he collapsed onto the floor.

It was over. He did it. For months he knew that he needed to get away from the Dr. He knew that this man was not the person he told Peter he was. Even when the words were whispered in his ear.. Peter managed to hold onto to one thought. He needed to get away. But, back then, he couldn't manage to gather the strength to do so.

So, when Bucky took him to that house and Mr Stark saved him... Peter knew he had been right all along. And he was glad that he was the one to get the last blow. Suck on that, Dr Octopus.

It wasn't over. All of the 'known' HYDRA agents might've been gone... but that didn't mean what they did to Bucky and Peter still wasn't circulating their brains. One bad moment and either of them could flip into the murderous assassin the organisation turned them into. It just wasn't plausible to turn them back into their normal selves overnight. And for Bucky? He wasn't so sure what that was anymore.

Steve knew, however. But he knew that it would be too much to talk to him about. He'd show him the sketchbook one day... maybe it would help him regain some of his memories.

For now...Tony, Peter, Steve and Bucky were put into the medbay for a check up. The blast had done some pretty bad damage... but, as Tony laid in bed, all he could think of was giving Bucky Barnes a new arm. That was definitely the first project that Peter was going to help him with when they all got better. Both physically and emotionally.

Tony wasn't sure how long he was in this stupid hospital bed for, but he really was getting bored. He closed his eyes, racking his brain to try and remember... something. It took him a while, but when he did remember it.. he sat up in his bed and his head whipped over to where Peter was laid in bed. The kid hated hospitals. He hated being constrained in bed, with tens of doting nurses and doctors hovering over him.

He tried reach for the teenager's hand, but he couldn't take his hand into his. He whined, cringing when his stomach burnt. He tried again, but was stopped when someone leant a hand onto his chest.

"Nat?" Tony whispered, looking up to her with wide eyes. She pressed him into the mattress, making sure he was all okay. "I need- I need to get to Peter."

"He's in good hands, Tones," Natasha said, pulling a chair up. "He's not awake at the moment.

Look at him, all innocently curled up in his covers.”

“He hates it, Nat. He’s- not, he’s uh- hates hospitals. We need to get him out of here. We need,” Tony rambled, struggling around in the bed. “Please, Nat-,”

“Tony-,” Natasha sighed, brushing his arm with her thumb. She pushed back his hair, trying his best to calm him down. “Look, Tones, he’ll be fine. The second he wakes up... we’ll get him into a bedroom. Sound good?”

“O-Okay,” was all Tony managed, before he promptly fell asleep again.

When he woke up again, Peter was in the chair that Natasha had been. He had wide eyes and was staring, as if Tony was an animal in a zoo exhibit. Tony looked to his side, seeing Bucky and Steve awake (they didn’t seem to see that he was, as they were far too busy looking into each other’s eyes).

“Mr Stark?” Peter asked, tilting his head to the side. “You okay?”

“Yes,” Tony told him, sitting up in his bed. He looked over Peter, making sure he didn’t have any wounds or bruises over his skin. He wasn’t aware on how much Peter remembered, but hearing his name again was all he needed.

“Um, so, I- I don’t know what- my brain is- all messed up,” Peter said, “But I know- I know that we’re close and-,” he looked down, “Am I wrong?”

“Well, uh-,”

Tony was interrupted by a glowing portal in the middle of the room, and then a red glow from a woman who stepped through the doorway. Tony tried to step off his bed, a pain going through him as he did.

“Sit back,” Strange said, his cape going over to Peter to curl around the teenager’s shoulders.

Peter jumped at it, clearly not remembering how she used to hang out with ‘Levi’ the cape, the one he named (he personally used to think it was adorable, before the whole ‘brainwashing’ thing). He stared at the new person in room, not knowing where he came from. Wanda waltzed into the room as well, giving Strange knowing eye contact. Peter, really, really, felt out of his depth. He stared at Tony, who looked equally as confused. At least that made him better.

Wanda raised a hand, making the room move around on its own. One bed moved by itself to the middle of the room, the sheets all flying off to the sides of the walls. Two pillows situated themselves by Bucky and Peter’s backs (after the spell also flew them onto the floor) making them comfortable. The red glow in the room made Tony squint, the light sensitive to his eyes.

Tony wasn’t sure what was actually going on, but it looked professional. Before they hurt his kid, however, he pulled Strange into the hallway to speak it all over.

“This was a random drop in, Strange. Would you like to tell me what you’re doing? You know, before you waltz in performing all these weird spells..,” He said, crossing his arms to appear more confident (Strange never seemed to buy it).

Strange rolled his eyes, shaking his head at Tony. He glanced into the open window of the hospital room’s door, where Peter was staring blankly back at him.

Strange always got along with the kid, even if they didn’t know each other that much. They had

only met once or twice, but in those small moments Strange knew there was just something special about this kid. Whenever Peter would laugh, or grin excitedly about magic that Strange showed him, he'd watch him and there would be a twinge in his gut that told him to be protective.

And once, when he closed his eyes, he got a vision of both Peter and Tony. Peter in Tony's arms, both of them grinning and smiling. They showed love for each other, more than they ever had before. Strange saw a glimpse of the father/son relationship that he just knew would happen. So, whenever they'd start to argue, he'd just smile at them and shake his head in amusement. Idiots, really.

"If we don't get that info out of their heads soon, Stark... they won't ever, ever, be themselves again," Strange told him, his voice a lot more serious than Tony had ever heard from their disagreements.

"Oh," Tony mumbled, biting his lip. "That does sound.., uh, bad. Could've just started with that, really."

"Well," Strange smirked, "I could've.. but I like seeing how annoyed you get. It's a hobby of mine."

Tony flipped him off, before stepping back inside the room. He leant forward and kissed the teen's forehead, before leaning back and thinking about what he just did. He ignored that (once again, whatever that was. No, really. He didn't know why he did that) as Wanda's fingers started wiggling around Peter and Bucky's skulls. Disturbing.

Tony sat, weirdly, in harmony with Steve as they waited for Wanda and Strange (definitely in the top five for the strongest Avengers, Pete said once) to do what they did best. They spent hours, probably poking around in the boy's brains. Tony waited for the moment that Peter opened his eyes, knowing who he really was. He'd lean forward and grab Tony, hugging him tightly. Everything would just be... great.

When Stephen came back from, what looked like, the comatose state he was in, Pete and Bucky still had their eyes closed (which did make Tony feel just a little nervous).

Bucky was the first one to open his eyes (well, after Strange and Wanda). He looked down at the clothes he was in and then down at his hands, memories flooding around his mind. Steve was staring at him, on the edge of running over. But when Bucky looked at him with a gorgeous smile, he just broke down. Bucky's hands were suddenly all over him, jumping in his lap to press his lips against his. Steve cried as he held the man's cheeks, kissing him back with the same force. Finally, he had him back. It might, still, take a while for everything to be back to normal... (he actually didn't think it would ever be) but, he didn't care.

Bucky still looked broken, but he still couldn't take his eyes away from his soulmate. His Stevie.

Bucky and Steve left the room, hand in hand. Only then did Peter open his eyes. Tony smiled wide, expecting a good response. Instead, Peter stayed still. He didn't move. It was like it didn't work. Tony looked up to Strange, who shook his head (it definitely did work, but something rough was going on in the kid's head).

"I'm so sorry," Peter said, immediately breaking down into a sob that made him curl into himself. "I killed people- I-,"

"Pete- it wasn't your fault, kiddo. They were in your head," Tony tried to explain, reaching out to put his hand on the kid's leg. Peter flinched back, jumping up.

"No," Peter cried, trying to hide on the top of Tony's med-bay ceiling.

Tony just had to watch as Peter ran across the ceiling, heading somewhere in the tower. Friday, without asking, let him know that the teenager ran straight into the bedroom he stayed in. Tony slumped into his seat.

Of course the kid still hated him. Tony must've been living in 'fantasy land' to think that the teen would ever want to be close with someone like him. But, once he thought about it, a lot must have been going on in his brain. The kid went through a horrible tremor and it was probably terrifying to know that he had done so much bad (which he would've never done without brainwashing).

"What do I do?" He said, mainly to himself. He forgot Wanda and Strange were still in the room.

"He is upset, he needs somewhere there. Even if he says he does not," Wanda tells him, "Trust me, Stark. I've been in the exact same position. Be there for the boy."

"O-Okay," Tony nodded, before awkwardly giving Wanda a thank-you hug (Strange got a thank-you handshake. Even if he wanted to give him a hug, which he didn't, he knew the 'wizard' wouldn't reciprocate that).

He walked down his towers hallway, hands tucked away into the pockets of his blazer. He hovered outside the kid's bedroom door, before he saw Rhodey and Pepper running towards him, smiling. He remembered what it felt to smile. It was way too optimistic. However, there was, currently, nothing to be optimistic about. Because he was Tony Stark and nothing went right when it came to his life.

James 'Rhodey' Rhdoes was Tony's best friend. Well 'best friend' was an understatement. Rhodey has been a brother to him all of his life. He was the first person, par JARVIS, to love him for him. It wasn't his money, or his connections, or, even, what he could make for them. He just... cared. Cared more than a lot of people had done before. It was a bit concerning, sometimes, because he really thought that he didn't deserve that at all.

They met at MIT. When Tony was about the same age of his Pete. But, Tony was nothing like the sweet angel that was locked up in his room. He was a snot faced devil-chid, who thought the whole college owed him. He was a child prodigy, the youngest kid to ever get accepted into college, and really, he was a huge alcoholic (yes, already).

Rhodey would come back to their dorm room, sighing when the small child would be laid down on the floor. Face-first. He'd have a bottle, or two, surrounding him. Rhodey would pick him up, helping him get up in the shower. He'd wash his hair, and body (with the most dignity. He'd get to keep his boxers in, of course), and just take care of him like a toddler.

He'd wake up in his bed, tucked up in a bunch of covers. Rhodey would already be awake, making up food for both of them to eat. He'd look at Tony with a disappointment dad(!) face (the one that still said 'I love you'. Tony never saw the one before), but he'd also tuck his hair behind his ear and tell him that he was proud that he got out of bed that morning. He'd pretend to be annoyed about that, but he'd feel so, so, happy that someone cared enough to see that his emotional pain was that bad.

And when he graduated? Howard Stark showed up for a second, just to see Tony accept the diploma. He didn't see his seventeen-year-old son give a speech. He didn't see how his eyes glanced around the crowd to try and find his family. He didn't see how his shoulders slumped when he only saw Jarvis. He didn't see how hard Tony cried when he left the stage, blubbering into Rhodey's shoulder as the older man held him into his chest.

Since then, Rhdoey wasn't exactly shy to tell Howard exactly what he thought of him. But, Howard Stark died only a few months later. Tony shed exactly one tear during the funeral and he wasn't even sure if that only fell for public appearances.

Rhodey knew absolutely everything about him. He could tell what he was feeling, just by how he held himself, or how he talked. It should creep Tony out, however it was oddly comforting. He just knew that he loved him.

So, the man could easily tell he was upset when he walked up to that bedroom door. He took one look at the man's posture, dropping his bright smile into concern.

"Tones?" Was all he could say, before Tony went rushing the other way.

Pepper and Rhodey shared a look. Rhodey nodded, letting Pepper know that he'd go after their friend/lover. Pepper decided to talk to Peter instead, trusting Rhodey with making sure that the love of her life was all okay.

"Rhodey-bear, love of my life (don't tell Pep).. I am just so happy that you followed me down to my lab," Tony groaned, halfway through pouting a glass of liquor. "And I am just so glad you I told Friday to give you and Pep access everywhere! Even when I tell her to lockdown."

"Apologises, Sir. Colonel Rhodes has an emergency code, that you gave him," Friday's voice said, not understanding Tony's 'clear' sarcasm (he'd have to work on that).

"Don't worry, baby girl. Not your fault," Tony mumbled, waving his hand up at the ceiling to dismiss the AI (he couldn't 'really' dismiss her, considering she was 'omniscient', but he was always one for dramatics). "So, honey, what are you doing here? I don't have clue why you would--"

"Tony," Rhodey sighed, taking the full glass from his hands. "Enough with the sarcasm. I can see the heartbreak all over you. What's wrong?"

"Heartbroken? I don't know what you mean, Rhodey. I'm fine. Well, more heartbroken that you stole my liquor without asking. If you wanted your own, I would've poured you some," Tony tried, but his voice broke as he spoke. He bit his lip, just knowing that he'd probably break down if he didn't have anything else to focus on. He turned his face, knowing that Rhodey had a magical ability to make his emotions spill.

He felt the hand on his arm, before he saw Rhodey's face. Rhodey pulled him into a hug, mumbling something about him being an idiot. And who did this man think his best friend was? He was actually a genius, thank you very much. Just an emotionally stunted genius, actually. So, suck that Rhodey.

"Peter- he still hates me, doesn't he? I mean, we weren't besties when they took him.. but he just, I don't know, he looked at me like I was one of the only people that ever cared for him and now he can't meet my eyes...," Tony eventually pointed out, as he realised his best friend was not going to let go until he spoke.

"He doesn't hate you, Tony," his best friend mumbled, rubbing his lower back gently (he liked that). "He's just scared. He's been through more than we realise. And, no, you didn't leave as besties, but he can see how much you fought to get him back. Your friendship is just going to keep growing..."

"You always say the best things, my Rhodey-bear," Tony praised, letting his head rest on the

man's shoulder before they finally came apart. And, if he wasn't a loyal man, he'd definitely give his best friend a little smooch to say thank you. But, unfortunately for Rhodey, he was, in fact, very loyal.

"I've definitely learnt what to say over the years," Rhodey winked, whilst pouring the drink down the sink. "Come on, bud, let's go and talk to the poor teen."

Tony just nodded, words too hard to speak. He let Rhodey guide him down the hallways, before they found themselves outside of Peter's room. When they stepped inside, Pepper was sat on the bed as Peter curled himself up against the wall. Both of them had red eyes, obviously they had been crying just as much as Tony wanted to.

The blanket that usually draped over Peter's bed was now around his shoulders instead. He looked just a little like ET, only his little face showing. There was a mess of clothes everywhere, almost looking like Peter had been making a nest. Bits of his hair poked outside of the covers, but Tony couldn't even get himself to laugh at how it looked. Because Peter looked so, so, damaged and he just wanted to pick him up and cuddled him until everything was okay.

But, his thoughts were... right. They had never even hugged before... the last time they saw each other, before he was taken, might've been without an argument, but they had plenty of those in the past. Now that he had his memories back...he knew how much his fantasy had gotten to him. They were barely friends, but Tony knew he wanted to change that now. He wasn't sure if Peter would agree.

He walked in, hesitantly, watching how Peter's eyes blinked up to him. His bottom lip immediately started to tremble, his eyes welling up with tears. Tony couldn't stand it. He wanted to go back and kill that Dr. And, then, he'd get Strange to rewind it, so that he could do it all over again.

Tony looked over at Pepper, who nodded at him. He turned over to Peter, kneeling down in front of the kid. "Hey, Pete," he said, putting his hand just in front of the teenager's knee. "I bet there's a lot going on up there, huh?"

Peter remained silent.

"Ok, I get it. You don't want to speak to me. I wouldn't either, if I'm honest," Tony told him, giving him a gentle smile. "I, uh, just want you to know that all of us are we for y-,"

"I don't want your pity, Mr Stark," Peter finally spoke, but Tony wasn't sure if that was what he wanted to hear. His voice was strained, showing to all the adults in the room that he had been through both physical and emotional turmoil. "I-I don't know why you're acting like, like- I'm not a murderer-!"

"Peter-,"

"No, just listen to me!" Peter pleaded. He pulled the blanket away from him, dropping it over his lap instead. He pulled up his sleeve and showed a bunch of bruises that had managed to retain over his skin. "Look. I-I got these-from people who were fighting for their life and I- I just kept going! I am a murderer, Tony. I don't know why you're trying to say that I'm not."

Tony stared at the marks, almost wanting to just run his hands over them and magically make them disappear. Peter didn't deserve this. Any of it. He wasn't what he thought he was. He was the furthest thing from a murderer. He couldn't hurt a fly. In fact, he wouldn't. Ever.

"Pete, kid," Tony sighed, "That wasn't you. You were brainwashed into doing everything. You've

got to believe me...,”

“Why are you acting like I don’t have \*everything\* that I for them still in my head?! Just because my old memories have come back.. that doesn’t mean these new ones will go!” Peter shouted, his hands shaking terribly as he did.

The way that the kid’s voice broke on the word ‘everything’ made Tony even more upset than he originally was. It hurt. Badly. Peter felt like someone was holding down on his chest, making it hard for him to breathe. He gasped for breaths as he cried, terrified about who he had become.

“Kid..,”

Tony couldn’t speak, as Peter interrupted him yet again. “And why are you acting like we’re best friends? Thanks for saving me and all, but you don’t have to pretend that you care anymore. Okay? Can everyone just leave me alone?!”

“You know we can’t do that, baby,” Pepper said, suddenly sitting beside Tony. He wasn’t sure when that happened, his mind too much of a haze to think.

“I do car-,” Tony tried to explain, at the same time as Pepper spoke.

“For fuck sake,” Peter muttered, pulling at his hair. He let some tears go, clearly incredibly frustrated. And when he looked up to see them all still standing there, “Please,” he pleaded, “Just leave me alone. Let me think.”

Rhodey gathered the other two up, making sure they stepped out of the room. He gently shut the door, peaking through the glass to see Peter sobbing on the bed. He looked away, not wanting to see the little one so devastated.

“I’m sure Bucky’s going through it all as well,” Rhodey said, sitting the couple down on one of their sofas. “We can get him to help out... you know, when he feels up to it..,”

“I don’t think he’ll want to leave Steve..,”

Sure enough, in one of the room’s down the hall, Steve held a sobbing Bucky Barnes in his arms. Steve pressed hundreds of kisses to the man’s face, his arms, his hands, just everywhere he could. They said ‘I love you’ for the first time, crying harshly into the other’s embrace. Steve just couldn’t let go. If he could, he’d stay like this forever.

“Ok,” Rhodey said, actually agreeing with what Tony said. “Then it’s up to you.”

“Me?” Tony laughed, as if what Rhodey said was hilarious. “You saw him? I’m the furthest thing from what he needs now. He needs someone who he loves and-,” When he saw how Pepper was looking at him, he wrapped his arm around her and sighed. “Look, Pep, you’ve got take the reins here, i’m way in over my head. He knows you the most.”

“You’re his hero, Tony. Even if he can’t say it. You saved him. You’re the one, par Bucky, who’s been through something similar to him. You can help him out, make sure he’s all safe. I don’t have a clue about what’s going on in his head. Please, Tones. Please do this,” She begged, trying so hard not to break down once again.

“Okay,” Tony finally agreed.

And, wow, he knew this was going to be a long ride.

He stepped inside of Peter's room later that day, holding a tray of food and drink. Peter was sat crossed legged on top of the ceiling, his hair messy. He quietly shut the door behind him, sitting on the boy's mattress. He sunk into the warmth of it, waiting for Peter to notice that he was there. When he did, the kid's eyes went wide and he almost fell from the blank ceiling.

"Hey," Tony said, offering him a smile. "Brought you some food. Didn't think that you were going to come and get some by yourself."

Peter slowly came down, hesitantly taking a bite of the (perfect) sandwich Tony made him. It seemed to calm him down, as he immediately relaxed on the floor by Tony's feet.

"I'm s-sorry about earlier, Mr Stark," Peter whispered, leaning into the man's legs. "I was just... scared. But, I mean, my point stays. I do still think that, uh- I'm still confused about why you're being so persistent."

Tony put a hand into the boy's curls, gently brushing through them. It felt so, damn, natural and he knew now that he should've been doing this all along. They should've never argued like they did before. Never. Even if the kid did push all of his buttons.

"I just want to make sure you're safe," Tony told him, putting another bit of the sandwich in the teen's hands. He gave him a look that said 'eat that', which the kid did. He was pretty good at this 'parenting' business.

"Yeah, I get that. My question is why?" Peter mumbled, half way through another bite (really, this sandwich was the nicest thing he had in a long, long time).

"Why wouldn't I?" Tony told him, "You're strong, smart, brave and everyone loves you. Every single Avenger was worried about you. You've got the world's bravest heroes at your beck and call, kiddie. We've got your back, always and forever."

Peter looked down, embarrassed. "I don't believe you."

"Kid-,"

"No, Mr Stark," Peter said, getting all riled up again. "You don't understand it. You don't know how much is going on in my head. You really don't."

"Peter, I, uh, you know how I became Iron Man, right?" Tony asked, patting the side of his 'mattress'. He smiled when Peter sat down, putting his hand gently on the kid's knee. The kid gently shook his head, telling Tony he didn't know the full story. "So, it's a long story.. but the gist of it is that.. I was kidnapped and tortured to build one of my weapons for the people who took me. I, instead, built the first prototype that became Iron Man. I know that it's not the same, but, uh, I know bits of what you're going through."

"Oh," Peter mumbled. His bottom lip quivered, once again, before he took a deep breath to calm himself down. "...I, uh, thank you- Mr Stark, thank you so much. I, just- don't know to take this all in and it-it hurts so much-,"

"I know," Tony sighed. "I care for you, kid. So, whenever you need me... I'm right here for you."

"Thanks, again, Tony," Peter whispered, before letting his eyes shut. He fell asleep right beside the man. He slept soundly, better than he had in ten months (without all the unknown memories swimming inside him). All because someone he used to hate was sitting right beside him.

Tony understood how scared the boy was. He didn't initiate any physical affection to anyone,

especially not to Tony. He knew the kiddo needed it, however, which is why he made the effort to make sure the kid knew he was there. He knew, because he had once been the person in Peter's shoes.

Tony knew, from that moment on, that whenever they had an argument that he'd always make sure to sort it out. Because Peter Parker had become a special kid, someone who he'd always, always, look out for; and he hoped that one day, the kid would see how much that was true.

He would be an idiot to believe that the kid was going to be 'okay'. He knew that what he did with HYDRA was always going to be haunting him (he knew from first hand experience), but he also knew that Peter had a whole bunch of people in his corner that loved every single thing about him. He'd get through this, no matter how long it took.

And they might have had a \*few\* disagreements since Tony "promised" not to argue with him. But, hey? What were they if they weren't disagreeing? That was just who they were.

## **Closer And Closer**

Boom!

Tony heard the sound from his bedroom. He left Peter alone with the rest of them for \*one\* hour, and this is what happened? Previously, Peter hadn't left his side for days and had been completely fine. And, now, when he finally let himself rest... everything went wrong.

He scurried to the lift, tapping his pen against his leg as he waited for it to go down to the lower levels. He closed his eyes, terrified that he'd see his kid bloody all over the floor. He couldn't go through all of that again, his heart couldn't handle the stress.

When the door opened, it was the last thing on his 'what's going on downstairs' list. He saw a bunch of confetti all over the floor, with Peter sat upon Thor's shoulders (as he giggled widely). Tony could see, however, that the loud noise terrified him. Nobody else saw that.

Peter met his eyes, the smile on his face only growing. Thor carried him around the room for a bit, before dropping him right into Tony's arms. Tony almost froze, but Peter just looked so happy to be there, so he continued to carry him.

"We having fun, bud?" Tony asked, before placing him down on the sofa. Peter hadn't smiled this much in a long, long time. It was so nice to see.

Peter nodded, before taking out a bunch of snacks he had in his jacket's pockets. He put one in Tony's hands, before plopping one in his own mouth. "Yeah, of course. I'm downstairs with all of you guys and I'm the furthest away from HYDRA and-"

Tony winced, not wanting to hear those words come from the boy's mouth ever again. Peter must've noticed as that smile dropped into a frown immediately. "Uh, you know what I mean-um, uh, anyway. I'll be down in your lab, if that's okay. I mean, you said it was. So," Peter got up, still covered in confetti, and walked straight out.

"It's like I just looked into the past and saw a young Tony all over again," Rhodey said, as soon as Peter was out of view.

"That's not good," Tony mumbled, slumping into the spot that Peter had just been sat in. "It's like he completely changed when I walked in. He was having so much fun and I've made it so depressing."

"Oh, don't blame yourself," Natasha told him, putting a hand on his shoulder. "Tones, he's just going through a lot, okay?"

Bucky, who was sat on Steve's lap, looked over and frowned. He had his arm wrapped around the man's shoulder, his legs curled up around Steve's. They looked ridiculously in love; Tony really wanted to barf from how cute it was.

"Tony?" He asked, when the man stared off into the distance.

"Oh, did you want to see the update in your new arm? Because me and Pete have been working hard on it, a whole bunch. I think we're almost there, but there has been a huge delay on the materials. But, don't worry Steve's lover boy, it'll be done soon," the man rambled, words falling out of him before he could shut up.

"Tony, that's not what I was trying to say," Bucky smiled, leaning his head against Steve's. "I can talk to him, if you'd like. You know, my head's just as scrambled as his."

"Oh, uh, that's nice of you to say-," Tony told him, "But, uh, I got it. You know, I think I'm finally finding out his tells."

"Okay, but if you need it... I'll be here," Bucky told him.

Tony nodded, before leaving the room from the same door that Peter went down. He stepped into the lab, seeing the teen hunched over by one of the holograms. He had obviously constructed some of the robots, if the nuts and bolts next to him had anything to say about it.

Peter's next project was, obviously, a new protective suit. The 'instant kill mode' that Tony had in his old suit (which he regretted), was now one of the main features. The arms were attached to his back, always on and forever projecting Peter from anyone that would ever come close to him. Tony knew how terrified the kid must be.

He sat, wilting for Peter to realise he was there. He must must've known, turning around to look the billionaire straight in the eye. But, still. He didn't say a word. It was like he had something he wanted to say that was just edging on the tip of his tongue. He simply shrugged at the older man, before turning back to his, obviously important, work he was looking at.

"You know, Pete; you're coming for my gig. With this whole 'I'll be down in the lab' thing," Tony told him, before stepping behind the teen and checking the work. Seeing what he was doing, it worried him a little. "What's all this, kid?"

Peter was silent, yet again.

"Kid," Tony sighed, as he rested hand over Peter's shoulders. "You're freaking me out with this whole 'silence' thing. I much prefer it when you speak. Which is not a sentence I thought I'd say ten months ago."

"Tell me all about you hated me before I was kidnapped. Sure, Mr Stark. That really does get the 'traumatised' teen talking," Peter said, whilst making sure they made eye contact, just so he could make sure Tony saw how he rolled his eyes.

"Hey?" Tony said, before raising his wrist and looking down at his watch to check the time. "Look at that, Pete. We've made it twenty-four hours without having an argument. That's our record, isn't it? I'd rather not start another."

"Well," Peter groaned, crossing his arms stubbornly. "Maybe I want to. Fight with you, I mean. It makes life 'normal' again. Almost."

"No, you don't," Tony smiled, looking right through those innocent eyes. "You really don't, kid. Now come on, tell me what's wrong. If you don't, I'll have the bust out the ol' 'disappointed' face on you and I really don't want to do that Petey-Pie."

Peter's face screwed up, but it was 'I'm amused, but I don't want to show that I am' face. Tony knew that now. It was obvious. He smirked at the kid, only laughing more when he seemed annoyed that Tony caught onto him so quickly.

"Petey-Pie? That's dreadful, Mr Stark," Peter mumbled, "Makes me sound like a four-year-old."

"Oh, that's what you are though, little one," Tony giggled (he was mocking him. It definitely wasn't a real giggle. Definitely not). "My little baaabbbyyy," he sang, squeezing the kid's cheek.

"Get off," Peter groaned, letting out a little laugh as Tony stood over him. He froze, when Tony's words finally proceeded in his mind. He stopped, looking up at Tony with a slight tilt of the head (he didn't know it, but Tony loved it when he did that. It was adorable). "Yours?"

"Uh," Tony blushed, rubbing a hand through his hair. He looked to the kid's screen, desperate to change the topic. He might've come to terms with seeing the kids as his, but he definitely wasn't ready to speak to the kid about it. He didn't need to know. "So? This stuff? What's it about?"

Peter watched him for a collective time of one second, before brushing those thoughts away. He stared at the hologram, zooming in on what he's been working on. He showed Tony some of the points, but the man only seemed to fixate on the 'instant kill mode', which really wasn't fair, was it? It wasn't like that was the one change he made... well, it was the biggest one and, perhaps, it was the most concerning. But, he needed it. He really needed it. He needed to know that nobody was going to hurt him anymore.

"Hmmm, uh," Tony sighed, "You can't have those arms on your back. I know that its scary, kiddie, but, you're not like that. You don't kill."

"It's not-," Peter ran a hand over his face, clearly stressed. His eyes flickered to the door and Tony just knew he was going to try and find his way out of here. "Mr Stark, look...can we not do this, please. Not now."

"Nope," Tony said, sitting on the desk that Peter's chair was under. "I'm afraid not, Mr Parker. We need to go through this now. I'm going to help you, Pete. I'm not letting you go throughout this alone."

"I need them, Mr Stark," Peter whispered, trying desperately not to cry. His hands shook. He looked up at his, now, mentor and secretly begged for him to just hold him and tell him everything was going to be okay. When Tony gently put his hand over Peter's, he took one deep breath to keep himself calm. "I can't stop- I can't- every single time I close my eyes I am back at that place. I feel... dirty. I feel like, um, I- I can't breathe. My knee's are pressed onto the floor, whilst a hand is on the back of my head and he's just pushing and pushing me into water and I- I can't breathe. And, then I blink and-and my hands are around an innocent person's neck- and I'm killing them-,"

Suddenly, Tony cut Peter off. He gently took the boy's wrist in his hand, pulling him up so he was standing. He wrapped the younger kid into the biggest hug he could manage, just holding him there. Rhodey called these types of hug a bear-hug, which made sense. He hugged Peter, so that he couldn't see the pain on the billionaire's face. He hugged Peter, so that the boy could just close his eyes and relax for the first time in a while. He hugged him to help the kid get away from his own mind.

The short difference in height meant that Peter's head slotted just in the crevice of Tony's neck. The man's hand reached his hair, just holding it there. He knew the kid responded to that touch, he had seen it so often with him and Pepper. They stayed still for so long. For so long that the lights flickered, turning off (motion-sensors, it really did help conserve electricity. He was eco-friendly, sure him). But, they still didn't move. Because all that was important was their embrace.

Peter's was still gasping and crying, causing a wetness over the front of his button up shirt. He didn't care, however. He really, really, didn't care. All he cared about was Peter. His Peter.

"That's it, buddy," Tony whispered, his voice low and quiet. He leant back just a little bit, so that he could press a kiss on the side of Peter's cheek. It was the first time he showed such a parental show of love in front the boy (whilst he had his memories back), and the boy really looked like he needed it.

As he leant back, the lights flickered back on. Neither of them let go. The power that this hug gave them was strange, but it just showed how much love had developed and grown between them. From the first moment they met, to now, they had shown such growth. And, really? Who were they kidding? Most likely, they had got along all this time... but they were both too scared to show it.

But, now? They really were not scared at all anymore.

Tony leant back, cupping the kid's face in his cheeks. He used his thumb to wipe away the tears that had pooled on his cheeks. "That's it, honey. That's it. I care about you so, so, much. You know that, right? But, I know you. You don't need those arms, buddy. You wouldn't hurt anyone. I can help you be safe. I'll make sure no-one puts a hand on you."

"I killed the doctor. I didn't even think twice about it," Peter pointed out, blinking up at Tony as regret poured over his face.

"I don't think he classifies as a human being, Pete. I don't blame you for doing what you did. No-one does. I probably would've done it for you... you know, if I wasn't all knocked out and stuff," Tony told him, smiling when Peter seemed to calm down.

Peter nodded, staring right back at Tony. When Tony's hands dropped, both of them expected Peter to just run. But, no. He just dropped his head back onto Tony's shoulder as he nodded over and over again, still crying. He pulled Tony's arms around him again, sighing in content when the man just stayed still and held him there.

As his tears stopped, Peter (who was still in his arms) whispered words that twisted Tony's heart. "I care about you too, Mr Stark. You meant a lot to me, even before you saved me from them. Probably since you let me go into that lab, but I just couldn't have another father figure. I-I just can't lose someone else."

"You're not going to lose me, Petey-Pie," Tony whispered, placing a hand over the teen's heart, "I'm right here. As is everyone who has ever loved you. Which is a giant pool of people, by the way. I'm just lucky I get to join the queue."

"Yeah, well, you've definitely moved up to the top ten in the last few months," Peter mumbled.

"Oh, be still my beating-heart, little one. You can't say those kind of things to me. I have a weak heart already, Parker," Tony laughed. He stepped away from his hug, whilst also putting a hand over it again (for the dramatic). "You're too kind, Pete."

"Kind? Me and you having a conversation with the word 'kind' in it, huh? It's like we've moved dimensions," Peter giggled, as Tony's hand leant around his arms.

Behind the kid's back, he shut down the hologram (he saved it, of course). He gently walked with the boy out of the lab, as he laughed alongside him. "Indeed it is, Petey-Pie. Indeed it is."

And, later that day, Tony watched on as Peter and Clint waited for Thor and Loki to walk into the kitchen (just ready to prank him). It was a similar scene to this morning, but just a little less chaotic. He just smiled to himself, finally letting his head hit the cushions' pillows with a soft smile (and when he woke up with drawings all over his face, he couldn't bring himself to feel happy. Because Peter just had such a \*big\* smile on his face, that annoyance just dissipated from his body).

Peter had his memories back for a total of 3 days when he finally confided in Tony that he wanted to try and get his life back on track. He wanted to go back to his apartment soon, to see his Aunt and hang out with Ned (and maybe Johnny would still want him). So, Tony sorted out the first

'phase' of his plan. He got May on the phone and organised for her to come to the tower (with Peter's permission, of course). And he couldn't wait to see how he'd light up when he saw her.

May walked in, looking terrified. Her eyes were glossed over, red and puffy. She definitely looked out of breath, but Tony didn't think to mention it. He took her bag and coat, walking her up to the Avenger's compound (where Peter was walking around the kitchen).

But their meeting was nothing out of the fairytale books. As soon as May tried to place a hand on Peter's shoulder, he jumped around and almost punched his Aunt directly in the face. He froze, seeing the terror in his face. He lowered his wrist, took one look at the two adults, and ran away as fast as he could.

She watched him run with pursed lips, not sure what to say. She hadn't been here since he got here, so she wasn't sure how bad it got. She hadn't been there for him and this is what happened. Really, she had been scared. Terrified to see her boy like that, so she hadn't even come to see him. The guilt was already eating her alive. And, if Tony's face said anything about it, Peter was broken (and, again, where was she?).

May had been at work, putting all of her frustration into her job. To get more money for the both of them, when he finally got home. But, it seemed like that had been the wrong thing to do. She should've been here for every step of the way. She should've been apart of the 'welcome committee', the moment they got an idea he was on his way home.

"May," Tony said, turning her attention onto him. "Whatever you're thinking, stop. He wasn't looking at anyone, you would've just been hurting both of you if you were here."

"That's not true," May disagreed, slowly shaking her head. "It's not."

"May..." Tony tried, "He's.. He wouldn't have said anything to you. He was confused. He didn't know what was going on..."

"Confused?" She said, her voice low and strained. She looked at Tony, waiting for him to just tell her what he had been through. To let her know what was wrong with her kid. "What did they do, Tony? Wh-What... and why? Why did they take Peter?"

"You might want to sit down. It's a long story," Tony said, gesturing to his most comfortable sofa in the room.

May and Tony sat themselves down on the sofa, as Tony placed her bag and coat on the coffee table. She looked at him, waiting for him to open his mouth and explain what the hell was going on. He didn't, at first. He was just... scared. What if May blamed him? (If she did, he already had his argument planned out. Admittedly, it would've been cruel. But, hey? He had his own back) What if she was angry that she was the last to know about Spiderman? What if... there was too many 'what if's' circulating in his head for him to be calm. May was still staring at him and he was just nervous. Probably the most nervous he had been in a while (weirdly).

He grabbed one of his cushions for support, squeezing it tightly (he was pretending that it was Pepper comforting him instead). "Okay," he finally said, whilst simultaneously taking a deep breath. "Okay."

"Tony? Why are- why don't you just tell me?" She said, her worry just getting worse (the longer he waited).

"It's, uh, okay," Tony mumbled, finding himself saying 'okay' a lot more than he had planned to.

"Okay. So. Peter's Spiderman. Surprise! He's, um, a superhero. A vigilante. A crime fighting spider. And, uh, pretty damn strong! And, um, they- you know- took him for that reason."

May didn't say anything (which was what Tony was scared about). Her hands clenched, and then un-clenched, and then- well, she just kept doing that over and over again. Tony noticed that Peter would do something like that whenever he was stressed. Which, apparently, was a lot. Perhaps it was just passed down the family tree. He watched May clenching her fists and a little bit of him began to get stressed too. He tapped his finger against his knee, looking away from her as her mind tried to get over what was going on.

Ten minutes passed. She, still, hadn't said a word. In fact, her fists were still clenching and unclenching. It freaked him out, actually. He swayed a bit to the left, trying to avoid a fist against his cheek.

May looked down to his feet, until she finally spoke. "You're not lying to me?"

Tony was a bit taken back, "Uh, nope? Not lying. I wouldn't do that. Not to the angry kid's Aunt (who can get even more angry than he does, by the way)" Tony explained, "So, uh, I should've told you that-,"

"I-I didn't ask," May whispered, "I've been so distant from him lately, Tony. I've- uh, I-I'm still struggling so much with Ben and I haven't been \*there\* for him. He's my little boy and I left him all alone and I didn't even come to visit him. He probably thought you two were closer to him and I was just at work trying to pretend like nothing was going on-,"

Oh, he couldn't do this. Not two emotional people in one day. Tony had never been one to be involved in other people's businesses. He had already hugged one of the Parker's today, was he really about to do it again? Not that he wouldn't. If she needed it, he'd totally let her. He just, well, wasn't used to all of it.

And for her to feel guilty? He understood it. He wouldn't say it to her face, but he was confused why he hadn't seen her face around the tower the second Peter was back. But, he also knew that it must be hard. To lose her husband and then, maybe, her nephew (who was more like a son) too. It must've been hard to deal with (still wasn't an excuse in his books). She really should've been the first to hold him, to help him get his memories back. But, she wasn't. And Tony could see that it was taking a toll on her, so he decided that maybe it wasn't the best idea to bring that up. She was probably trying her best, anyway.

"May, I...,"

"Don't tell me I'm wrong, Stark," May mumbled, putting her hands in her hair. "He's my son. I-,"

"He'd understand,"

"He shouldn't have to!" May said back, an ounce of bitterness and regret in how spoke. "I shouldn't have put my own feelings of grief first. He must've been going through the same thing, terrified. I-I wasn't there for him and I wasn't here when he came back. I-,"

"Be there for him now, then," Tony interrupted. "He's probably gone back to his bedroom. Go speak to him, okay? FRIDAY will show you the way."

May put a hand on his knee, looking at him with a soft, thankful, face. "Thank you, Tony." Tony could see the tears trying to fall, but she held them back (obviously, she didn't want to show more emotional vulnerability). "Thank you." She took off from the sofa, walking down the hallway and

Tony heard the soft noise of FRIDAY coming from the ceilings as she left.

Job well done (well, from him.. anyway).

May gently knocked on the door that the AI took her too. It opened after a loud bag came from the inside. And as the door slowly moved open, May saw a lot of stuff all over the floor. He must've fallen open it as she scurried over to the door handle. He looked at her, guilty (even though he didn't need to be).

May looked at her kid, sympathetically. She slowly shut the door after her, gently kneeling down to help him up. He flinched away from her touch, just scaring her more than she already was.

"May- I-," Peter said, "I almost hit you. I'm so sorry-,"

"I scared you, baby. It wasn't your fault," May softly told him, putting his hand just by Pete. "Do you want to come for a cuddle? We can pretend like its the old days, huh? Would you like that?"

Peter nodded enthusiastically. He followed May to the bed, as she sat down, and jumped into her open arms. He curled up into her lap, resting his head upon his Aunt's shoulders. She run a hand through his curl's, trying not to look at the wounds over his small frame. She started to cry, after holding it in for so long, hating that her kid looked like that.

He didn't smell like himself. Peter, before they took him, would always sneak Ben's favourite aftershave from his stuff (just to try and smell like him again). She'd walk through the door and breathe in, smelling Ben like he'd never left. And then, Peter would try and sneak past her as he went to return the bottle. She'd always refuse to mention it, knowing how much they both missed him. Plus, it was nice to have something that reminded her of her husband.

His messy hair was even more messy than she remembered. It stuck up from his scalp, a little longer than usual. In fact, it came just a bit across his ears. And his body? It was usually covered in scrapes.. (she assumed it was because he was clumsy, not Spiderman), but now? Everywhere she looked there was a bruise, or a wound. She closed her eyes, not wanting to see it anymore. She couldn't. Not another person she loved, hurt. It was horrible.

When she re-opened them, Peter was looking up at her with a strained, hurt, face. She cupped his cheek, running her thumb over his skin to push off some dirt. He was just so precious... she loved him more than she had been showing recently. And now she was going to be there for him, when he needed it most.

"I love you," May whispered, gently rocking the kid back and forth. "I love you Pete, I love you so much. I'm so sorry."

"Why are you sorry?" Peter asked, smiling at her with own tears in his eyes.

"I've said some messed up things to you recently, Pete. I-I wasn't there when you came a back and-and you must've though so much, baby, and I promise that I'll be here. Whenever you need it. I know that Mr Stark wants to keep you here for a while, to monitor you, but I'll visit all the time. Okay? Ned can come too, if he wants. Just until you can come home...,"

Peter looked away, distancing himself from May's arms. He hid underneath the blanket, making an effort to give her a dramatic sigh. "I just want to go back to normal, May. I don't want everyone to look at me like I'm some fragile piece of glass that's going to break. I know I got tortured, I know I've been through more than anyone knows (well, except Bucky).. I just want people to... I don't know, treat me like they did before. I'm not- I'm bit completely broken, I-I just-"

"Honey," May sighed, leaning over to sort out the blankets (so that he could see her face). "People are going to worry about you," she whispered, pushing some hair out of his face. "Pep told me that she has never seen the Avengers that frantic, especially Tony. Tony never gave up on you, you know. He spent every single hour that he could on you. He never left that stupid lab, always checking every single lead he had. No matter how small. He cares a lot about you, even if he won't tell you the full extent of it."

Peter looked at her, confused. "Wait... what? He did? I mean, he did kind of tell me he cares about me today, but... that much? Wow..."

"I don't why you're surprised, Petey," May smiled, unable to keep her doting hands away from his face. "Tony doesn't do anything if he doesn't want to, babe. Of course he wasn't going to give up on you..."

"It's true," Tony said, leaning against the doorway. When he noticed Peter's blushing face, he gave him one of his 'charismatic' smiles. "I really don't do things if I don't need to. Also, sorry for the whole 'dropping into conversation'. Pep wanted you both to know that dinner's almost ready."

"Thank you," both the Parker's replied, almost in perfect synch.

Tony just smiled. "Anything for the best house guests..."

Peter was getting a lot better. He spent most of time with Tony and Pepper, or sometimes with Bucky and Steve. He'd flinch whenever someone accidentally splashed water in his face (and with Clint, that was a lot of the time) or if Thor accidentally spoke a bit too loudly. But, other than the constant nightmares and paranoia that they were still out there... he was fine. Really, he was. Fine.

It wasn't a particularly hot day, but Tony could see that Peter just needed to be out of the building. He was bouncing around the walls like an excitable toddler. Even the God of Thunder and Super Solider's were struggling to keep up. So, as Natasha and Clint argued over who got to race Peter next on Mario Kart, Tony pulled Peter aside and offered to take him out for some ice cream. Peter, of course, agreed.

They took the least flashiest car, Peter's request, and drove across the city to Tony's favourite ice cream bar (the lady there loved him. Well, she probably loved the publicity she got whenever he was in the area). But, this time, he was trying his hardest to camouflage into the crowd with Peter.

They walked into the shop, and the lady immediately recognised Tony (he really should've hidden his beard). "No cameras today, Tony. I'll make sure of it," she said, as if she knew the reason for him coming here. "Not when you've brought your boy. How old is he?" Oh, she definitely thought Peter was his son.

"I'm fifteen," Peter told her and he definitely didn't understand what she had meant about it.

And, oh, that was right. They missed Pete's birthday when he was.. well, when he was gone. He'd definitely needed to plan the best birthday party he could... or maybe he shouldn't. Peter definitely wouldn't want that whole 'shebang' after what he had been through. Maybe he'd just take him and Ned out for a birthday dinner (Ned would definitely appreciate it, if Peter didn't. Which he probably would).

"Give me the best scoops of whatever you want, preferably the best in the whole collection," Tony inquired, whilst he slung his arm around the teen's shoulders (if the lady thought this was his son, he was definitely going to milk it. It made his heart happy).

“Only the best for Tony Stark,” the lady assured him, whilst scooping up two bowls of Tony’s favourite flavour (only the best, of course).

So, only ten minutes later, Peter and Tony were sat on a bench that was overlooking the ocean. In each of their laps was a bowl filled to the brim of coffee flavoured ice cream, and then another bowl was on the bench of mint (just waiting for them to eat). Tony’s left arm still over his shoulders, as the teen was tucked into his side. They sat silently, only the noise of the waves making any noise and occasionally a local seagull would make its presence known.

Peter’s eyes were constantly looking around, terrified that somebody was going to walk in. But, they couldn’t. Tony could easily form a gauntlet around his wrist, blasting anyone who tried to harm them. He was safe underneath Tony’s arm. Always.

When both their bowls were finished, Peter moved from where he was sat. Tony’s hand dropped, as he walked away to take the bowls back to the ice cream shop lady. Peter began to breath heavily, in and out and in and out and-

Before he could spiral, Tony’s hand (he recognised it) gently lead on top of Peter’s shoulder. He was back on the bench, putting his hand on the boy’s knee to let him know he was right here.

“That’s it, buddy. You’re doing a good job. So good. In and out, okay? Nobody’s going to hurt you. Nobody’s coming for you.”

Peter scrambled to take Tony’s hand, gently sighing in relief as he squeezed it. It felt like the only thing that could calm himself down. It grounded him.

Tony pressed his lips onto the boy’s knuckles, waiting for him to calm down before he talked. He took off his own jacket, noticing how much the boy was shaking from the cold. He put it around his shoulder’s, before taking a tissue from his pocket to wipe away the boy’s bubbling tears.

“You’re the best, kid,” Tony whispered, “I’m so proud of you.”

Tony continued squeezing his hand, before his breathing was finally back to normal. Peter looked at him as if he was the only one in the world that was important. He smiled shyly at the man, trying his best to try and think of something to say. But, Tony beat him to it.

“I’m so honoured to be an important person to you, Peter. And I’m not trying to push myself into your life, but it just happened naturally. I, I mean- what May said earlier about me working non-stop to get you back? It was definitely true, as much as it makes me sound like an idiot,” Tony told him, “Kid, I promise you that nobody’s going to take you again. You’re safe.”

“I know, Tony. I know, because you’re here with me,” Peter told him.

And it was definitely true. Nothing bad was ever going to happen to them... ever again (hopefully).

## Back At Home

### Chapter Notes

thank you for all the support!!! The comments always make me smile (and all the kudos, bookmarks and reads:) )

Peter woke up in his bedroom in a sweat. It was his last night here, and he was definitely going to miss it. He wasn't exactly 'happy' about going back to school, but he knew it was next step to normalcy. Tony wasn't here, right now, as he was across the city in some meeting (so, nobody walked in to calm him down).

Peter had gone for a 'quick' afternoon nap, that had turned into hours. However, it was just wishful thinking to believe that he could sleep without something disturbing him.

In his, now favourite, pair of pyjamas (Iron Man ones that Tony had gifted him, back when they didn't get along), Peter Parker walked to the Avenger's kitchen to get himself a snack. When he did, he awkwardly walked into Bucky and Steve making out on the cabinet.

He tried to escape, unannounced, but Bucky happened to pull away and make direct eye contact as he stepped through the door. Peter's embarrassment only grew when he heard Captain America's flirting, and he definitely never expected to hear that in his lifetime.

"Come on, baby," Steve said, pressing kisses up and down Bucky's jawline, and Peter was certain that his hands were getting lower and lower. "You make it so hard to not just-,"

"Stevie," Bucky whispered, with a slight giggle. "We're not alone."

Steve's head whipped around. His eyes widened when Peter was stood there, awkwardly waving at the man. A blush crept on to the man's cheeks, as Bucky wrapped his arms around his waist. Bucky put his head onto Steve's shoulder, tucking his hand into his boyfriend's front pocket.

"Hey, Pete," Bucky smiled, "I thought you were in bed."

Peter smiled, trying very hard to not start laughing at Steve's face. He walked to the cabinet, sitting down on one of the bar stools. He grabbed an apple from the fruit bowl, taking a bite out of it. "I couldn't sleep and Mr Stark isn't here, so he didn't come running in like he always does. Thought I'd come and grab a snack before trying to fall sleep again."

"If that ever happens again, kid, you know me and Stevie are here," Bucky said, moving one of his hands to put his hand on the kid's shoulder. Steve nodded, silently telling the kid that Bucky was right (whilst also being a little too embarrassed to speak). "Tony might know how to comfort you, but I've lived it. Might be nice to speak to someone who knows exactly what they did to you."

"Thanks Bucky," Peter smiled, "I'll take you up on that one day. How has it been learning everything about the new world?" He asked, taking another bite of the apple his hand (Mr Stark only brought the most fresh fruit, even if its only a bowl on the side of cabinet).

"It's hard. Even if I was awake for a while, HYDRA never let me see the rest of the world. The future is astonishing," Bucky replied, "And Stevie's been through the same thing, so it's not too

bad. Still a bit confusing though.”

Steve tucked himself away from Bucky, turning to the fridge to make Peter a snack as his boyfriend talked to the kid about his nightmare. He pushed the plate in front of him, grinning when Peter seemed to enjoy the food. He always did love to make people food as it was the language of love.

“Sorry about what you saw,” Steve said, eventually (it was still on his mind). “Your eyes are innocent. I can’t believe I-,” he began to laugh as the two people in the room started to snicker, “It’s not funny!”

“I’m not completely innocent, Mr Rogers,” Peter grinned, laughing when both of them turned to him with wide eyes. “What? I’m fifteen, not ten!”

“Oooooh,” Bucky whistled, “Don’t tell Stark that his baby’s growing up, he’ll start blubbing. So, who’s the lucky woman?”

Peter eyed Bucky, raising his eyebrow (as if to tell him he was part of the group). He laughed louder than he had in a long, long, time when both of the men started to realise what he meant. They cheered, putting their arms around him.

“He’s one of us, Stevie!” Bucky smiled, ruffling his hair with his arms around Peter’s torso. “Who’s the man? Do we know him? We’ll keep it quiet, if you bring him over...” the man winked.

“Bucky!” Steve laughed, nudging him. “I still don’t want to hear about him doing all of that. But, son...are you being safe?”

“Nope!” Peter exclaimed, putting his hands over his ears. “I really don’t want to hear one of your PSA’s right now on safe sex, I already hear enough of the other ones in gym class! Plus! Don’t even need to hear it, okay? We’re not- you know- yet...,”

“What’s this I hear about safe sex?” Tony said, entering the room with a brief case tucked underneath his arm, he fell back in surprise when the kid ran and hugged him (probably trying to change the subject, but Tony was a smart man who wasn’t easily derailed. Well, he was... but, not when it came to his Pete). “Mr Parker, I don’t want to become a grandad.”

Peter seemed to sigh in relief when he said that, which only made Tony worry more. What wasn’t he telling him? Hmm, he’d definitely find it out sooner or later. Right? “You calling yourself my dad?”

Tony looked down at the kid, who was still tucked in his arms, and grinned at his curly hair, “I’m not, not, saying that,” he told him, before pulling away and looking down at his outfit. “Wow, what a greeting I get. My own merchandise on my favourite kid. Truly a sight to behold, Parker.”

“Yeah, why are you here? Pep said you’d be gone until tomorrow morning,” Peter said, already forgetting about the conversation he was having with Bucky and Steve.

“FRIDAY told me you had a nightmare. Got worried, jumped in a suit and made my way allll the way down to this kitchen,” Tony explained.

“You did that for me?” Peter asked, eyes sparkling with wonder. Tony always did surprise him (in a good way).

“There’s not a lot of things that I wouldn’t do to make sure the people I care for are ok,” Tony told him, lightly squeezing his cheek. “That includes you. Alas, here I am.”

“Thank you, Mr Stark,” Peter whispered, once again invading Tony’s personal space.

He did that a lot, recently. After they first hugged.. it was like Tony opened a floodgate of Parker hugs. He wasn’t complaining, however.

“Don’t think you’re off the hook with this whole ‘safe sex’ thing,” Tony told him, as he simultaneously wiggled his eyebrows. “Don’t go following in your old man’s footsteps, okay? Seriously, that wouldn’t be good for anyone. I’m talking proper bad, Pete.”

“Ewww, please stop,” Peter groaned.

“How about me and you go get some hot chocolates from the penthouse? And then, we’ll fall asleep whilst watching some shitty film,” Tony told him, abandoning the subject.

He really didn’t like talking about his past anyway. He swung his arm around the kid’s shoulders, waving goodbye to the two super soldiers as they walked away.

Steve and Bucky watched in amusement, as they listened to the duo ramble on about something science-y. Neither of the two soldiers knew what they were on about, but they looked excited. Bucky was watching them go, with an odd look on his face. Steve hadn’t seen him look like that in a while.

“Baby?”

“He’s really good to Pete, Steve,” Bucky whispered, holding his hand with a renowned vigour. He sighed, before tracing Steve’s palm with his index finger (it calmed him down). “I just, I-I want to make sure nothing happens to him, still. I know Tony’s safe, but I can’t help thinking that something is going to take us both back one day. You know?”

Steve frowned. He took Bucky’s metal hand into his, even if he knew the man couldn’t feel it. He pressed a gentle kiss to the side of Bucky’s mouth, putting pressing him up against the counter. “He’s in safe hands, as are you. Baby, Pete’s a strong kid. I know that you looked after him in that horrible place, but you’re away from it now. I know you’re still looking out for him, but there’s other people who can do that now. You can relax, a little.”

“You say the best things, Stevie,” Bucky whispered, pressing his lips against Steve’s jaw. They had a slight height difference, but it wasn’t too much. Bucky didn’t even have to stand on his tiptoes to reach Steve’s mouth. “And now we’re alone again...,” he giggled, running a hand down his partner’s leg, “there’s other things...,”

“Jesus christ!” Clint Barton exclaimed, covering his eyes. “Get a room!”

Laughter was heard throughout the kitchen from probably a mile away. And if Clint chased Bucky and Steve out of the kitchen a few minutes later, nobody said a thing.

“I don’t want to go back to the apartment,” Peter complained, as his head leant against Tony’s. “I want to stay with you and Pepper, can’t May just move in?”

Only a week before, Peter was adamant to himself (and Tony) that he was ready to go back. But, now, he definitely wasn’t. All he wanted was to stay with Tony and Pepper, drinking hot chocolate until they fell asleep.

Tony smiled sweetly at the kid, taking a remote to pause the film. He looked at the kid, who immediately let his shoulders drop (he knew what Tony was about to say). And, oh, he already had the bottom lip blubbering. And Peter knew that was his soft spot. He knew it. So, really, it was

cruel that he was doing this to him.

"You know that we can't do that, Pete," Tony sighed, as he made sure the blanket was tucked around both of them. He rolled his eyes as Peter started to cry crocodile tears, knowing he wasn't being serious.

"Oi," Peter pouted, "These are totally real tears here."

"Well, they will be. You know...tomorrow. When you do actually go," Tony smirked, laughing when Peter pushed him. He continued laughing at the kid as he \*tried\* to glare at him, before he started laughing himself.

"You're an evil man, Mr Stark," Peter told him, as he pretended to turn the other way on the sofa. "Evil. Proper evil. I don't even want to stay here now."

"Oh, sure you don't," Tony told him, pulling him back where he was sat. "But seriously, kid. You'll be fine. Completely fine. In fact, you'll prosper without an old billionaire watching your every move... and you'll see Ned and MJ again. It'll be good."

"What if I want an old billionaire watching my every move?" Peter asked, resting his head against Tony's chest as he fidgeted around on the sofa.

"That sounds creepy, Pete. I wouldn't go telling people that," Tony chuckled, "Kid, seriously, it'll be fine. In a week or so, you'll forget that you even had reservations about it. I'll be the only one still upset about it."

Peter's legs stretched out over the armchair, as his body tangled in with the older man's. It felt good to have another father figure in his life again... but, still, it was scary that he could leave in any given moment.

Ben used to hold him like this, whenever he'd come back from a long day at middle school. He'd always wear this cologne that would be bitter in Peter's nose, but he didn't care. Because Ben's arms would wrap around him and hold him close, as they pretended to watch whatever movie that was displayed on TV.

Distinctly, he remembered that his dad would do it too. Obviously, he couldn't remember much of it. He was very young when his parents died, but he'd have flashes of old memories. His dad's laugh as he lifted Peter up to the ceiling, twirling him around like he was flying (he wasn't sure if Tony would do that for him now, but he could always ask. If he didn't, Steve could).

Peter stared at the blue light of the arc reactor, incredibly happy that this was the real thing. Tony's hand was in his hair and it was combing through the strands, making him incredibly sleepy.

"Kid?" Tony whispered, after Peter hadn't replied in a while. "Come on, talk to me. Or are you asleep? If you are, just hit me. Or not. I'm fragile."

Peter mumbled something, so Tony figured he had nodded off. He sighed, feeling emotional himself that this was the last evening he had with Pete in the tower. He knew it wasn't forever, though, as he had already planned a sleepover in a week or two. Whenever he wanted to, anyway.

Peter was just special. He'd never known that he wanted to be a dad, but Peter took that feeling and squashed it into the ground. Every single time the boy smiled, or laughed, he'd get this feeling in his gut of pride and happiness. He was a dad... (sorta).

"I'll miss you, bud," Tony whispered, before turning the TV off and letting himself fall asleep as

well.

Bucky Barnes was hand in hand with Steve Rogers, as they sat in the back of the black car that Tony Stark was driving to the ‘little one’s’ apartment. Tony and Pete were sat in the front, obviously, chattering something about one of their projects. Neither of them were looking back at the other two, but they wouldn’t have it any other way.

They pulled into the apartment’s car park, the car’s engine quieting down as Tony pulled the gearstick to park. Peter didn’t move as the car stopped, desperately trying to stop himself from crying. He looked over at Tony, who’s face was equally as screwed up.

“I-I don’t want to-;” Peter started, grabbing Tony’s hand. “Please, Mr Stark. Please don’t make me. I’m not ready, I-,”

“Pete,” Tony said, his voice strained. “Bab-kid, come on, rip the band-aid off. You just gotta go up there.”

“I don’t want to! Do you not understand?” Peter snapped. He let go Tony’s hand, turning to stare outside of the front car’s window. “Please, Tony! I just want to be with you, please.”

Tony took his hand away, holding in his tears. He opened the door, stepping outside to go and grab his suitcases from his car. He went to take one of Peter’s items, but his hand was pulled back by Peter wrapping his arms around his waist.

Tony sighed, wrapping his arms back around him. He held Peter as he quietly cried, causing a stain on the man’s button up (again). He rubbed Peter’s back, looking around to ensure that no paparazzi were watching them.

The crying got louder, making Tony just squeeze him tighter. The boy was gasping, trying his hardest not to get out of breath. The strength in his grip was hurting Tony’s arm, but all of his focus was only on Peter.

“Come on, kid. Come on. You know you’ll be okay. Kiddie, it’s only me here. You know you want to go up there. Whenever you need someone, I’ll fly Pepper over here. She’ll always be there, bud,” Tony tried to reassure him, keeping his own tears at bay.

“I want you! I want to stay with you!” Peter begged, grabbing parts of Tony’s blazer as he pulled away from the hug. He stared up at him as the tears fell down his cheeks, “Please, Tony. I’ve loved being a-at the tower, I love being around you! W-We’re like the same a-and I-,”

“Sweetie,” Tony sighed, taking his hands. He squeezed them tight, frowning at him gently. “I know, look- I know. I understand. But, it’s time.”

A few minutes passed, as Bucky and Steve waited in the car. Tony wiped his tears with his sleeve until they came to a close. Peter’s bottom lip was still trembling, looking at the floor instead of Tony.

Peter’s shoulders slumped, as he turned to the car and grabbed one of the suitcases. He knocked on the car window’s in the back, wanting Steve and Bucky to come and say goodbye too. He gave both of them a cuddle, lingering just a little with Bucky. Bucky let a tear fall as he watched the kid walk upstairs with Tony, suitcases rolling behind them.

They went to the apartment door that Peter hadn’t seen in so long. He froze as Tony put his hand on the door knob, going completely numb when it opened. This was the place where he was taken. The last time he was here, he had a knife to his throat and tens of HYDRA agents surrounded them.

He remembered how he kicked and screamed, trying so hard for them to not drag him out of his home. How they leant the knife into his flesh, with bits of blood bubbling up down his body. How they grabbed his wrists and pushed a needle in, making his whole body collapse onto the floor.

The fear he felt, the moment he first saw all of them. The feeling in his stomach, even as he walked through his door. That feeling, the way his heart pulsated, was everything that he never wanted to feel again.

These memories were never going to leave him. The whole room looked exactly it was when he left, clean and organised (May loved it that way). There wasn't, however, an indication that something so dark happened within these walls.

“Peter?”

He remembered how much he thought about his family when he was gone, how much he cried into his arm. How he thought he'd never, ever, come back to this room.

“Pete?”

When Peter came back to the real world, Tony was knelt over him. He was on the floor, arms tucked around his waist. He was staring at the door, scared out of his mind. Tony's face had fallen, very worried about what was going on in his head.

“I-I can't-, uh, last time I was here- t-they came,” Peter whimpered, blinking to stop even more tears from coming (at this point he was dehydrated).

“Oh, shit. Kid, I'm so sorry. I didn't even think about that,” Tony whispered. “Should I walk you in? Would that be good?”

“Yes please,” Peter mumbled, grabbing his hand as they took slow steps into the apartment's door.

“There, see? It's all good,” Tony reassured him, whilst sitting him down on the sofa. “Alll good, kid. I'm so, so, proud of you. Of all you've been through.”

Tony slipped down onto the sofa with Peter, texting Bucky and Steve that he had called a driver for them. He knew May had to work that night and he wasn't going to let the kid stay here all on his own. He'd take the sofa, or Peter's floor. Whatever he had to for the kid, he'd do. It wasn't a hard decision, not when it came to Mr Peter Parker.

Peter slept soundly that night, up to Tony's chest (which, again, had become regular for those two). Tony whispered words of encouragement whenever he'd wake up in a sweat, and he'd laugh again and again when Peter looked surprised that he was still there. Every single time.

May walked in at 5am, to see Tony Stark on her sofa tucked in with her nephew on his chest. Even though she had known Pepper Potts for so long, it always did freak her out that her family was so close to one of the richest men in the world. She leant over, kissed Peter on the forehead, and snapped a photo of them. That photo was definitely getting sent to Pepper (who, in turn, sent it to all the Avengers).

“Peter,” Tony mumbled, looking at his watch. It was time for his first day back at school (luckily, he was allowed to go straight in sophomore year. Tony was not letting him stay back a year). Well, in forty minutes or so. He nudged him and tried his hardest to wake the teenager up. “Peeeettter, you're cramping my leg. Come on, you need to get dressed.”

Peter fidgeted, mumbling something underneath his breath. He opened his eyes, immediately just

cuddling tighter into Tony. “No, not time. I’m warm.”

“Peter,” Tony laughed, “You’ll be showing up in one of the coolest cars on planet earth, it’s immediate street cred.”

“Please never say that again,” Peter mumbled, as he got up from his spot. “That’s not as cool as you think it is, Tony.”

“Excuse me, I’m Iron Man. I think that means I can say anything I want,” Tony replied, sitting up on the Parker’s couch.

“Yeah? But I’m Spiderman (who’s a lot cooler),” Peter winked, before walking into his room and grabbing himself a new outfit.

He changed into his new clothes, choosing something with long sleeves to avoid anyone from looking at his bruises. He looked at himself in the mirror with a frown. He looked gaunt, a lot smaller than he had been before (which, even then, wasn’t exactly ‘big’). His hair wasn’t long anymore, as Clint had given him a haircut (surprisingly, he was quite good at it). His shirt was a simple white t-shirt, with some nerdy science thing printed on the fabric. The jeans were too big on him now, so he had to put on one of his tightest belts to keep them from falling off. Luckily, he didn’t look too much like someone who had been in captivity for ten months (and now gone from school for about eleven).

“Looking smart, kiddo,” Tony told him, as he grabbed some food from the kitchen to pack up a lunch for the kid to take. A very big lunch for a kid that needed a lot of food.

“I look like I haven’t eaten in a year,” Peter groaned, grabbing his backpack. “Do I have to go back? Can’t you just homeschool me?”

“As much as you’d get the best education from me, you know that’s not what you really want,” Tony laughed, making him turn around so he could put the lunch into his bag. He patted the kid’s gelled hair (he didn’t ruffle it, as he didn’t want to be murdered by the little Spider), and laughed even more as the kid walked depressingly over to the door. “Peter, stop being so dramatic.”

“I am not being dramatic,” Peter mumbled, crossing his arms. “There’s just a lot of people I haven’t seen in a while, so I’m just nervous.”

“Peter, you’ll be fine,” Tony said, “And if you’re not? I’m here. I’ve dropped everything for the next week, so you can always call me. Even if your teachers tell you to put your phone away. I’ll just buy the school and fire them, if they do that.”

“You can’t buy my school,” Peter laughed, as he walked down the apartment’s steps to get into Tony’s car.

The car drove through the neighbourhood, both of the people inside of it silent. Peter stared out of the window as the views went by, trying to talk to himself out of his nerves. He hadn’t seen Ned in a long time, so he was excited for that. But Johnny? Would he even still like him anymore? Would Flash bully him? What if he had a flashback as he did? He might end up knocking him out..

He didn’t have long to think, as the car turned into the carpark. He knew people were looking, not knowing it was him inside. Tony’s car was sleek, modern, and very expensive. It definitely looked out of place for the area.

Peter stared at the school he used to know so well, swallowing. He put his hand on the door handle and took a deep breathing, trying to keep strong. Tony’s hand gently squeezed his knee, letting him

know he was there for him.

The door opened and Peter stepped out, wincing when he heard a gasp from one of his own classmates. Tony then stepped out, which caused even more gasps from more students. Tony's arm was around his shoulders, guiding him through the sea of people.

"Peter?" He heard someone call.

Both of them turned around, seeing Ned looking up at them with wonder, excitement and distress in his eyes. Peter, of course, had texted him to remind him that he was coming back today. But seeing him in real life? It was a lot better than he could ever imagine.

Ned rushed forward, as Peter did. They met in the middle, hugging each other with an energy they never had before. Peter tucked his head into the side of Ned's neck, both of them tearing up.

Ned didn't look that much different. Sure, his face had matured and he had gotten taller, but he was still Ned. His best friend, who always had his back.

"Oh my god," Ned said, "I missed you so much, man. I can't believe you're here. I can't- I-,"

Peter pulled away, smiling wetly at his best friend. Ned's eyes glanced over him, terrified at how different he looked. He held Peter's hand, blinking. "Are you okay? Are you hurt?"

"I'm fine, man," Peter smiled, "Well, I am now. Thanks to Mr Stark. I'm just happy to see you again...,"

Later that day, after Tony talked to the principal about Peter's demands and mental health (and adding himself to the emergency contact list) and left, Ned was assigned to help Peter around. They walked into his class and everyone immediately went silent as Peter stepped inside.

Peter made eye contact with Johnny, who looked shell shocked. His shoulders were broad and more filled out. His hair was a little longer, styled into a middle part. His face, however, was the same. His eyes were so emotive, so blue, and Peter couldn't look away from them (well, until the teacher assigned him the seat next to Ned).

Nobody looked away as he sat down, staring at him as if he was a dead man walking (which, in fairness, did make sense. They hadn't seen him in a year). Nobody talked much that lesson, apart from a whisper or two from Peter or Ned (Ned was the only one who was going to treat him the same, he assumed. Maybe Flash would do when they all got comfortable).

The bell went, making Peter jump out of his skin. He grabbed Ned's hand, gripping it so hard that it could've fallen off. He took two deep gasps, breathing in and out like Tony had taught him. Ned stared at him, worried, but Peter brushed it off. Everyone walked on eggshells around him, as they walked outside of the classroom. He was pretty sure that people were starting to figure out what might've happened to him...

As Johnny walked with his friends down the hallway, he looked back at Peter and Ned with a look that the boy didn't recognise. He was looking back for such a long time that he walked into a bunch of students coming the other way.

The third period was gym. They were all in the changing rooms (Peter was allowed to stay out of the class for a while, as the teachers knew bits of what happened. Obviously, not everything... but enough). Ned recognised the look of longing in Peter's eyes as he looked over at Johnny. He patted his back, encouraging him to go and speak to the other teen. He did, gently tapping him on the shoulder as he spoke to the other popular kids. Johnny turned around, biting his lip when he saw

who it was.

Johnny immediately abandoned his conversation, guiding Peter over to the corner of the hallway. Peter's back leant against the wall, as Johnny looked over at him.

Peter took his breath. As he took a deep breath in, the scent of Johnny's aftershave filled his nose. Johnny was dressed in a tight fitting t-shirt, showing off the curves of his torso. A nice jacket was over his shoulders, matching the colour of his trousers. He looked good, better than before (which wasn't something he expected, as he already looked incredible before).

"Peter?" Johnny said, his voice low and concerned. "Is it really you? I mean, of course it is- I-I mean, wow. You look-,"

"I know, I look horrible," Peter whispered, looking down at the floor. "I-I look like-,"

"No, no way," Johnny quickly interrupted, putting his hand on the side of Peter's waist, "You could never look bad."

Their conversation was awkward, between interruptions and words that barely came out. But, neither of them cared. They just... were happy to with the other.

"Do you still... I mean, do you like me? I know I've been gone a long time and I don't expect us to just pick everything up all over again..." Peter said, careful not to say anything too loud in case Johnny wasn't out. "I mean- I wouldn't want to for-,"

Johnny shook his head, taking his hand. He intertwined their fingers, looking over at their joint hands with a soft smile playing at his lips. "I never went a day without thinking of you, Peter Parker. You're perfect."

"I'm not sure about that," Peter giggled, looking down at his feet. As he looked across the floor, nobody else was in the room with them anymore. The scene was very familiar, making Peter think about their first kiss.

Johnny put one of his fingers on the edge of Peter's chin, moving his gaze up to meet his eyes once again. The finger slowly moved up his face, until it was near Peter's lips. Johnny's thumb traced his bottom lip, until the boy's mouth slowly opened.

"I am," Johnny whispered, before dropping Peter's hand. He put his, now, free hand on Peter's hip to pull him into his space. "I really am, Pete," he said, before leaning in.

Peter whimpered as Johnny's lips touched his. Just the feeling of love, of someone caring about him that much (other than the adults in his life), made his heart swell. His arms immediately wrapped around Johnny's waist, closing his eyes.

Johnny's hands travelled to his hair, just combing through it as he kissed Peter with a passion that was hard to forget.

Peter squeezed his eyes, tight, as his lips moved against Johnny's. His whole body felt as if it was on fire, feelings of passion bubbling over his arms and legs. Peter's nose welcomed the smell of Johnny, just making him weak at the knees. In fact, it made his knees so weak that he fell to the floor. Johnny, however, just used one free arm to pick him back up, putting a knee in between Peter's legs.

Peter moaned into the kiss, as Johnny picked up the heat. He tugged at Johnny's hair, pulling him even closer. Their legs, and everything else, were intertwined as they kissed.

Johnny moved his hands up Peter's shirt, accidentally brushing up against some of his wounds. Peter winced, pulling away immediately. He put a hand over where Johnny touched him, squeezing his eyes shut to try and disguise the pain.

Johnny's face fell, concerned that he hurt Peter. He stepped back slightly, waiting for the other to look back at him. "Peter?" He whispered, "Are you, uh, okay? U-Um Ned- told me sort of what happened? Did I push too hard? I didn't mean to-,"

"Johnny," Peter whispered, "It's fine. I'm fine. You didn't push too far, it was nice to pretend as if nothing else was going on. You make me feel like that... make me feel free."

"I do?" Johnny said, edging his hand closer to Peter's.

Peter looked down, noticing Johnny's hand. He took it, intertwining their fingers and smiling up at the boy. "Yes," he said, leaning forward to kiss Johnny's cheek.

Johnny, cheekily, turned his face over to meet Peter's lips as he leant forward (which made Peter giggle into the kiss). They stayed like that for a while, until the teacher came in and told Johnny to hurry up and get to class.

Peter was in lunch when everything changed. In one moment, he was happy and eating the lunch that Tony packed him that morning. In the other, his whole body froze and a blank stare that he forgot about returned to his face.

Midtown's homecoming was coming up soon, which Peter completely forgot about. What he also forgot was that 'homecoming' was one of HYDRA's command words (which, apparently, wasn't out of his mind). So, when some of the students gossiped about the dance, Peter heard the word across the cafeteria.

So, there he was. Sat in silence as he awaited for someone to give him a command. To kill. To harm. To do anything. He just couldn't move on his own whim.

"Peter?" Ned whispered, noticing his best friend's change in demeanour. He frowned, trying to shake him out of it. Still, his best friend didn't move an inch. It was terrifying "Pete?" He tried again. "... fuck."

Ned immediately called Tony Stark, grabbing Peter's phone to do. He put his wonder aside (he was a huge Iron Man fanboy), nervously begging the man to come. He heard how scared the adult sounded, coming to the realisation that he cared for Peter just as much as Ned did.

Tony landed outside Midtown Tech in only ten minutes. He rushed past the reception, not giving a fuck as people told him to wait. He ignored the kid's surprised faces, almost running to where Peter was.

"Peter?" He called, immediately spotting him in the crowd. Ned, MJ and a blonde boy he didn't recognise were crowding him, all of them making sure that no other students could spy on the conversation. "Oh, shit. Kid," he said, taking the boy's hands. "Oh, baby. Come on. Look at me, kiddie."

Peter's face turned to Tony, watching him with dead eyes. The man could tell that there was something behind them, begging Tony to help him. "That's it. I'm here. Always. You going to snap out of this for me? Get back to yourself, Petey. Come on."

Peter blinked, staring at Tony. Blink. And a few more. A minute or so passed, before the boy's mouth turned into a shy smile. Tony returned the smile, leaning forward to give him a kiss on the

forehead. “There we are, there’s my kid.”

“Tony, I think something is wrong,” Peter whispered, “I’m not- It’s still in there. It’s still in my head,” he collapsed into tears, latching himself onto Tony.

Tony picked the boy up, gently rocking him as Peter tucked his legs around Tony’s waist. Peter was sobbing in his shoulder, terrified that he’d never be normal again. Never.

“We’ll go back to the tower, kid. I’ll get Strange over and we’ll see what he missed. Okay? It’s going to be okay.”

Ned carried his backpack, Tony carrying him, as they went over to the reception to sign him out. Tony drove him to the tower, immediately telling FRIDAY to bring Bucky into the room as well. As he was in the middle of explaining what had happened, Strange came through a portal in the middle of the living room.

“I hear that it all didn’t work,” Strange said, frowning. He walked over to Peter, pressing his palm against the kid’s forehead. He closed his eyes for a second. “HYDRA’s conditioning is still up there, it’s quite deep. We might have to take both of them to Wakanda for a while. I’m afraid there’s some things that even my magic can’t reach.”

“Wakanda?” Tony asked, “But- he’s just come home, Strange. Isn’t there anything we can do here?”

“I’m afraid not, Stark. This is the only hope.”

And that’s how Peter and Bucky ended up in the country, frozen in two tubes next to each other. And, hopefully, everything the evil organisation did to them will actually get out of their heads. For good.

## **Pranks And Loving Confessions**

Peter blinked, unaware of where he was. The machine shut down, from instruction of King T'Challa, and both of the two men's eyes slowly opened. From the outside of these holding places, Bucky and Peter saw Tony and Steve looking back at them (Clint and Natasha looked like they were deep in conversation in the back of the room).

It had been a month. A whole month, again, without Peter in his life. Again. He hated it and it just kept happening. He just wanted to spend time with Peter, without anything happening to them at all. He had been miserable again, just spending a lot of time with Pepper to take his mind off anything else. He didn't even want to look at his projects, knowing Peter wanted to continue them with him.

Peter stumbled out of the pod, falling into Tony's arms. He looked around the room with wide eyes, noticing every single person was looking at them. He squinted, trying to figure out who they were.

"Pete, this is T'Challa. He's the king of Wakanda," Tony whispered in his ear, knowing how disoriented Peter must be feeling.

"King?" Peter squeaked, trying his best to bow. When the king laughed, his face flushed red. He simply leant back into Tony, still blinking as he adjusted to the light. "Mr Stark?" He asked, only continuing when the man looked down at him. "Do you think this is what babies feel like when they're born?"

Tony stopped, smirking at him. He laughed as he sat Peter down on a nearby bench, only laughing more as that blush grew. "Honestly, kid. I'd love to see what goes on in that brain of yours."

Steve helped Bucky sit next to him, both of them relaxing when they realised the other was okay. T'Challa walked over, explaining that this was the second time they had come out of the pods. Peter didn't remember that first time, however. Apparently they had used the trigger words to see if they were still there, but both of them responded as if they were (which meant they had to be frozen again).

This time, they didn't have a single response to the words. They didn't stare blankly, or reach for a weapon. They remained themselves. Finally free from HYDRA's evil constraints. Again. But, this time? It was for good.

"Hey, buddy," Tony said, when Peter's smile turned up and the boy looked up at him with big, innocent, eyes. Peter tried to get up, but he wobbled on his feet as if was walking on the ocean. "Hey, sit back down. You might feel a bit disoriented."

"Am I better, Mr Stark?" Peter asked, blinking. Tony's hand touched his cheek and he leant into it, his eyes fluttering shut. "Is Bucky?"

Bucky's head was rested on Steve's, groaning about something. He was clearly in a bit of pain, but he looked good. He looked normal. But, still. He was damaged. He knew it wasn't beyond repair, but it scared Peter. Because what if it took him years? What if it took until he was fifty one and grey for him to get over this? What if he couldn't live a normal life?

Tony looked at the boy, frowning at how small he looked. His body didn't have any bruises now (his super healing really did wow him sometimes), yet his face was still forlorn and strained. He

looked scared. Terrified. A lot like he had been when they first saw each other after he was taken. It hurt Tony, but he knew why.

And as the kid whimpered, asking him if he'd ever be okay, his heart was torn apart. He simply cupped his cheek, knelt in front of him and gave him a reassuring smile. "Yeah, Petey. Yeah, you'll be all fine now. You're with me. Your favourite old man, huh? So, of course you're okay. And, yeah. Buck's fine. No need to worry."

"Mr Stark," Peter smiled, "Thank you."

Peter had to stay at the palace for a while, just to make sure everything was okay. Luckily, it was a break at school... so he wasn't missing too much (well, more than he already had). He was able to text his friend's this time, as he wasn't locked up away in a holding facility. Johnny was confused why he was suddenly in a palace, but MJ (who didn't know about Spiderman) seemed to process it straight away. Ned knew everything, as he always did.

Peter and Shuri became a duo that nobody expected. A bit like his relationship with Clint, Peter chose to use his talents to prank and confuse everyone in the vicinity. And whatever vine was (Tony was very, very confused about that one), both of them seemed to be very impressed by it. Tony tired his hardest not to flip when an empty bottle hit his head, followed by his teenager yelling "Yeet," through the hallway.

They stayed up into the evening, looking over blueprints. It wasn't like Tony was jealous, but the boy seemed to be more impressed by Wakanda's tech. T'Challa didn't let him forget that, either. He'd walk over, put an arm around Peter, and stare over at Tony with a knowing smirk. Tony was just a man and T'Challa was a king, who could live up to that?

Peter, currently, was running down the hallways. He was holding Tony's hand, rushing him to the lab that he was sharing with Shuri during his visit. Tony followed him with an amused face, looking at how he rambled excitably. It was him. Peter was a young him in the modern age. He was Tony's kid, always and forever. He just needed to let him know that. Properly.

"Peter," Shuri said, "Are you sure that we want to take him into our secret plan? This is for genius brain's only."

"Excuse me," Tony laughed, "I'm a genius, thank you. Best brain on planet earth, according to every media source alive."

"They don't know about mine, Mr Stark," Shuri winked, "And I'm sure that Peter's creeping up on you. Don't let that get to your head, Parker."

"I don't think I'll ever be as smart as Mr Stark," Peter beamed, looking up at the man that he was still holding onto. "He's super smart, Shuri. Like, super smart."

Tony chuckled, ruffling Peter's hair. "Thanks, buddy. But don't sell yourself short, sweetheart. You probably will reach me one day."

The secret plan entailed pranking Shuri's brother, the King of Wakanda. Peter had been hesitant at first, as he believed in respect and morals. But, Shuri had gotten through his head and explained how he wouldn't even be mad (Peter wasn't so sure). Uncle Ben's voice echoed in his mind. "Be responsible, son." But, hey? He was young, he had room to grow.

Tony refused to join, but he didn't tell the king. He wanted to see how this went. He just didn't want to face the wrath of Black Panther. A superhero that would, most likely, be able to plummet

the Iron Man suit in a swipe. Maybe. Tony reckoned he could get an advantage, if he really believed in himself. If he asked Peter, the boy would totally be on his team. That always did make him giddy (also, he was pretty sure that Peter had already used this prank on him once).

Bucky was told about the plan. He, like Tony, did not tell T'Challa, but didn't join in. Also, he didn't tell Steve. Steve's whole life relied on his good morals, on being a good person, and Bucky definitely wanted to see this out. If that meant telling a little lie to his boyfriend, he'd have to do it. He could just distract him with kisses.

Shuri had been waiting for the perfect partner for this prank for a year. Then, like a gift from the gods, Peter Parker was frozen in her lab. As soon as the broken white boy, in her words, started to speak, she knew this was the person she had been looking for. Smart, agile, and tactical. Perfect for a prank.

It was hard to get Peter on board, at first. He was almost as morally focused as Captain America. But, Peter? She could see the glint of destruction in those eyes and she couldn't wait to exploit that.

Her prank wasn't anything new. It was the recipient of the prank that was making her excited. Sure, she had pranked her brother before. But never anything massive. Somehow T'Challa always knew her next step. He wasn't know what was about to hit him this time.

T'Challa's bedroom suite was huge and always pristine. Shuri wanted to get in there and plaster the walls with post it notes. It was the easiest prank in the book, but there was a reason for that. It was annoying, tedious to clean up and just funny. Also, it didn't actually harm anyone and, even if she did like a bit of destruction, she didn't want to injure her brother.

Peter's job was to survey the area. T'Challa liked him. He told him he was smart, intelligent and a good man. When he saw him in the hallways, he'd always stop and talk to Peter. He would always, always, offer him a tour of Wakanda and Peter would respectfully say no, scared to be too much of a burden. This time, however, would be different.

Their plan was working. Peter, who was not, not, wearing an earpiece (yes, he definitely was), was standing by the man's suite. He shuffled on his feet, waiting for the 'target' to walk his way. He was nervous. Very nervous. He didn't want the king to fall out with him, as he definitely enjoyed his company.

King T'Challa walked around the corner, the lights of the kings behind him (dramatic) shining behind him. He spotted Peter, immediately giving him a soft smile. "Hello, son," saying words that made him sound suspiciously like Steve Rogers. "How are you today? Feeling normal?"

"Hello, Sir," Peter smiled, attempting to bow (he always told him off when he did that, but he always tried to. Always). "I'm feeling good. How are you?"

"No need for the formalities, Peter," T'Challa said, wrapping his arm around the man's shoulders. "I'm very good today. I mean, look at the sunny weather. A perfect day for a tour, wouldn't you say?"

Perfect. The plan was playing into their hands. Shuri knew too much of her brother's moves. So planning this prank? It was as easy as simple equations.

Peter looked at his feet, pretended to think about it, and then nodded. He smiled, accepting it. "Okay. I want to see every inch of Wakanda! If that's okay, sir?"

"Of course, Peter."

T'Challa and Peter walked around the area surrounding the palace, looking like Simba and Mufasa scouting pride rock. He pointed out the best places, showing different buildings that might be of interest.

Meanwhile, Shuri was sticking hundreds/thousands of post-it notes all over the plain walls. She smirked at her job, all of it designed into the shape of Black Panther's suit (she wasn't just going to put the notes up, she was a lot more advanced than that). Her lip was curled up in a smirk, when she walked outside and saw Tony looking at her with crossed arms.

Before he had a chance to say anything, the princess interrupted his chain of thought. "Peter is like a son to you, no? It's why you're here."

Tony stopped in his tracks, a bit confused why this was coming up in conversation. He tilted his head, trying to figure out what he was supposed to say to that. "Uh, more like a- a pain in my ass. He's not-,"

"You Americans are so dramatic," Shuri sighed (dramatically, so she had zero room to speak), as she simultaneously rolled her eyes in a way that can only be described as *annoyed*. "You can't lie to me, Stark. I see it. He doesn't. Let him know, before you regret it."

"I don't know what you mea-,"

"And if you spill the beans on our project before he sees it, I'll kick you out of our country and let T'Challa adopt Peter," she said, before turning away and walking down the hallway. And Tony swore she mumbled something that sounded like 'idiot' underneath her breath.

Well, he wasn't sure what just happened. But, he knew the princess was right. Peter was- well, where was he? As if on cue, he heard the sound of Peter's rambling coming down the hallway. Peter was in conversation with T'Challa, talking about one of his projects he was doing with his... his dad? He noticed how Peter's face flushed, quickly telling the king that he meant Tony (Peter didn't know the billionaire was further on, hearing everything he was saying).

Tony rushed around the corner, hoping to save Peter from being too embarrassed.

"I thought you were Stark's son? I mean, not by blood. Just thought you two were at that level, anyway. That's what we got from how often he was over here. He'd sit and watch you when you were frozen, terrified that you were going to be alone in there," T'Challa asked, his hand on his bedroom's door knob to open it up.

"He did?"

"Oh yeah, of cour-," The king stopped, as the door opened and his eyes surveyed the notes. "Shuri!" He shouted.

Peter put his hand over his mouth, trying his best to stop himself from laughing. But when Shuri started to snicker, running back down the hallway, he let it all out. T'Challa's face was a mixture of amused and annoyed (and luckily, not angry).

Shuri wrapped her arms around Peter, laughing alongside him. They both ran to her lab, ignoring how T'Challa shouted after them to clean it up. When the king met eyes with Tony, who was still around the corner, his smile grew.

"Stark, your kid's a menace," The man said, "I think that you need to keep those two apart."

"Yeah. He is, isn't he?" Tony smiled, watching him go with a fond, fatherly, smile over his lips.

When they went home, finally, Peter felt as if something was happening. He sat in one of Tony's car, tapping his knee anxiously.

Tony was watching him, getting nervous that he was nervous. Did he find out what Tony was planning? Did he hate it? He had organised a 'welcome home' party, as well as a 'happy (very) belated fifteenth' party. At the tower, the team (and Johnny Storm, Ned Leeds and MJ Jones- he noticed these were the three contacts he texted the most) were displaying balloons and everything else parties needed. He just wanted the boy to enjoy it, but he just looked so, so, nervous.

"Pete?" Tony whispered, nudging his shoulder with his own. He put his hand on the kid's knee, squeezing it, so that he looked up and made eye contact with him. "Sweetheart, what's up? You think you're ready to come home? Because T'Challa won't mind if you stay in Wakanda."

"I'm okay, Tony," Peter said, resting his head on Tony's shoulder. He squeezed his eyes shut and took a deep breath in. "There's just something in the back of my head. It's weird to describe, but it's just like I know something bad's going to happen."

"Ah, kiddie," Tony whispered, kissing him on the side of his temple. "It's okay. If it's not, I give you permission to hit me. I mean, you'd probably hurt me, actually. You've got strong fists. Bet you can tackle me to the ground and take over my company. I mean, you will eventually-,"

"I will?" Peter asked, confused. "Don't you want to wait until you and Pep have a kid to finalise that sorta thing? I don't think that I'll be a good CEO, Tony."

"That's where you're wrong, my Petey-Pie," Tony told him, moving his hand to take Peter's. He squeezed it, holding it close to his chest. "Definitely wrong. But, time will tell."

Peter smiled. He always did when Tony busted that nickname out. Tony gave everyone nicknames, it was just what he did. But, he seemed to have more for him (he did, he counted). Even if he didn't use the 'rare' ones as often, it also made his heart flutter whenever he said anything like that.

The car drove to the familiar spot of the building, parking in front of a sign that read 'property of Tony Stark (AKA Iron Man)'. The driver came and opened the door for both of them, even when the billionaire told him that wasn't necessarily. He was a good man. Tony made sure to tip him with two hundred dollar bills that he had laying about in his pocket (that \*always\* baffled Peter).

They walked, hand in hand (of course, Tony was trying to stop his kid from spiralling), up to the Avengers common room. Staff members stopped them to say hi, but only a small percentage actually wanted to speak to Tony. Most of them had some sort of conversation with Peter, who remembered all their names. It was sweet to watch.

When they finally went up to the Avenger's 'team-building' floor, Peter was confused why no lights were turned on. He walked through the hallway, as Tony flipped the light switch, and thought he heard May talking. But, that wasn't right... right?

"Tony? Something- my head's buzzing-," Peter said, staring at the door as his heart thumped out of his chest. "Tony?" He whimpered.

Tony wrapped a hand around his waist, whispering "Surprise," in the kid's ear, as he opened the door gently.

The team, Ned, MJ, Johnny, May and Pepper (as well as Bucky, who went home a day before Peter did), jumped out from behind the sofas. Peter blinked, his eyes watering, as he looked around the room.

The sofas were pushed to the side of the room, opening up the floor for all the party supplies. Tables were all over the place, filled with snacks and food (all of Peter's favourites). Wrapped up presents were on one of the many table's, all addressed to Peter. The banner wrapped across the room, saying happy late birthday/welcome home on them (home again, for the second time).

"This is for me?" Peter whispered, his face only screwing up tighter when everyone said yes.

He turned around, flinging himself around Tony's body. He snuggled into the arms, putting his head into the crevice of the man's neck. He took a deep breath, taking in Tony's calming scent. "Thank you, Tony," he whispered, before turning back and greeting all of the guests.

Tony watched, as the rest of them said their hello's to Peter. Peter seemed to linger around this 'Johnny', kid, so Tony made sure to keep his eyes on that. Nobody was going to defile his kid on his watch. And this 'Johnny' was now touching Peter's arm, and his hands were going lower and-damn, he better stop. Tony wasn't even sure if the kid liked boys, but that didn't matter. He didn't care what gender was trying to flirt with his \*kid\*, it wasn't going to happen under his watch (he might be overly protective, but, sue him, he had a reason to be).

Tony floated over, taking two glasses of squash over to the boy's. When Johnny noticed that Tony was standing there, his hand dropped from Peter's arm and his face turned an awkward red. Yeah, that's right.

"Hello boys," Tony smiled, propping the two glasses up in the side. "Just popping in to say hi, no other reason."

"Oh hello, Mr Stark," Johnny said, an urge of nervousness in how he spoke.

"That's sir to you, boy," he winked, laughing when Peter glared at him. "Just joking," he announced, putting his arms up in his defence. "Call me father-in-law, Tony, Iron Man, genius, or whatever comes to mind."

Peter and Johnny exchanged a look, confused on what the billionaire was going on about. Peter mumbled something about grabbing a snack (and getting away from this conversation), leaving Johnny and Tony alone.

Tony crossed his arms, eyeing the person in front of him. What kind of name was Johnny Storm? It was pretentious. He looked like he was the biggest jock in Midtown, who was going to mess his kid around and throw away the heart when he was done with it.

"So, Johnny, you and Peter seem.. close," Tony said, pulling the kid to the side (so that the other Avengers couldn't talk him out of giving a teenager the shovel talk). "I don't mean to... form an opinion on something small. Have you got good intentions? Because Peter's a very important kid to me, you see."

"Um," Johnny mumbled, "I- I don't know what's he said, so, um, I'd rather not say anything. You know, I'd hate to, um, say the wrong thing! When he gets angry, he does that thing when he screws his face up and his little nose twitches and-and, uh- it's so cute and- um," he stopped himself, blushing red. "But, no. No intentions, as nothing's going on. Nothing at all."

"Sure....," Tony drawled, staring at Johnny's face. "Now, Johnny, if there, hypothetically of course, is something going on... then, I'd like to let you know that he has a lot of enhanced people behind his back," he put a hand on the kid's shoulder, squeezed, and let go. "So, yeah, be careful, hey? Don't break his heart."

“Yes, sir,” Johnny saluted, before tucking his hand by his side. He bit his lip as Peter walked, obviously checking Tony’s kid out. Tony pursed his lips, pretending not to notice it (but, oh, he definitely did). “Uh, thanks for the, uh, snacks Peter,” he added, as Peter shoved a Spider-man cupcake in his hand.

“Would you just give us a second, J,” Peter said, sweetly. He thanked his not-boyfriend (but, they almost were official), as he pulled Tony’s hand to push him into a nearby hallway.

“Tony!” He said, pouting up at the man who was trying to hold back his laughter. Peter, however, wasn’t laughing. He crossed his arms, “What did you say to him?”

“Who? J? Oooohhh, J! My J!” Tony mocked, giggling underneath his hand. “I just gave Johnny boy a shovel talk. You know, yadda, yadda, yadda, ‘don’t hurt my kid, or I’ll hurt you’.”

“Jesus,” Peter groaned, rolling his eyes so hard that Tony was afraid that they’d fall out. He shook his head, a small, hesitant, smile forming on his face. He looked at Tony with a fake scowl, pretending to be annoyed at the man’s protectiveness. But, also, he was slightly happy that Tony seemed to not care about a potential relationship with him and Johnny. “You might’ve scared him off!”

“I hope I did,” Tony told him, wrapping his arm around Peter’s waist. “Because nobody is good enough for my boy.”

“Jesus,” Peter laughed, “‘My boy’, who do you think you are? Anyway, me and J aren’t like that-we, uh-”

“Hnmm, I definitely saw the lingering arm movements-,”

“Uh, Mr Stark?” Peter asked, nervously digging his nails into the side of his arm. “Would you, uh, mind if, uh, if we- if something was going on between me and Johnny? If I, uh, want to be in relationship with a man?”

“Of course not,” Tony said, raising an eyebrow. “Why would I ever care about that, kid? I’m not some bigoted asshole.”

Peter let a breath, one he didn’t think he was holding. “I was just worried, Tony. I don’t know.. some people do, I guess.”

“I’d never do that, bud. Love is love. Plus, who would I be to judge? I totally had some flings with boys at MIT,” Tony chuckled.

“Oh?” Peter giggled, “How scandalous, Mr Stark.”

“Does this mean that you and Johnny are actually a thing?” Tony winked, nudging Peter’s shoulder. “Because, kid, safe sex is a very important thing that we should talk about.”

“Nope! No, we’re not doing that!” Peter laughed, waving his hands to try and get Tony from talking.

Both of them laughed, the sounds filling the whole room. Tony guided Peter up to the rooftop, both of them sitting in one of the closed off sofas on the balcony. The party was still happening downstairs, but everyone knew not to bother Tony Stark whenever he pulled Peter into a serious conversation. And, everyone knew when he had that conversation planned. It was in his face (or, sometimes, he’d annoy the person he was having a conversation with).

Tony put an arm over the boy, looking up at the stars. The stars littered the sky, looking better than they had in a while. If he looked hard enough, he could make out the orion constellation. He noticed Peter looking too, the wonder in eyes reflecting how bright the stars were shining.

“Tony?” Peter asked, when they sat in silence for ten minutes (or so).

“Yeah?”

“Thank you, for what’s probably the fifteenth time I’ve said it. But I mean it. I really mean it,” Peter whispered, shivering as the wind flew between the duo on the sofa.

Tony smiled, kissing the side of his temple. He grabbed a spare blanket from the back of the sofa that they sat on. He wrapped it around his body, making sure he didn’t get ill from the cold weather. Before he could reply, Peter began to speak again.

“Did you, uh... can I ask you something?” Peter said, yawning.

“Of course, baby,” Tony replied, squeezing him in tight. “Ask ahead.”

“Did you ever hate me? You know, in the beginning,” Peter asked, “Because I really was a pain the ass. I always annoyed you, for no reason, and-,”

“Stop, kiddo,” Tony told him, rubbing his arm. “I never hated you.”

“Never?”

“Of course I didn’t,” Tony told him, “I’m just a stubborn person, Pete. I didn’t think and I was weirded out that I cared about you so much, or that you seemed to love everyone, but me.”

Peter looked down at the floor, biting his lip. “Yeah, sorry about that. When we met... I literally just lost Ben and, uh, I felt as if we’d get along and I just- well I freaked out, really. I didn’t know if I’d ever have another good father figure an-and, uh-,”

“No need for apologies, kiddo,” Tony told him, “Somehow, I still care about you. A whole lot. I’ve never, ever, wanted a kid, but you? You’re my boy.”

“Thanks, dad,” Peter grinned, taking his hand. He put his head on the man’s shoulder, “I’m really tired. How about we go and say goodbye to the party goers and, uh, watch a Disney film? Or something like that?”

“Sure, buddy,”

Peter closed his eyes, falling asleep as soon as Tony said ‘sure’. He really was tired, after all. He didn’t even stir as the billionaire picked him up bridal style. Peter’s legs dangled over his arms, his eyes closed and his head leant against Tony’s arm.

Tony carried Peter, carefully, back down the stairs. He walked into the main room, telling everyone that the little spider boy was very, very tired, and it was time to tuck him into bed. May came over, kissed him on the forehead, and asked Tony if he’d drop him off at the apartment in the morning (he reluctantly agreed).

Tony put the boy down in the boy’s bedroom, tucking him under the covers. He kissed him on the forehead and sat on a chair that was close to the bed. He waited to see if the boy was okay, before heading out.

“Tony, Mr Stark-,” Peter mumbled in the sleep, fidgeting around in the covers. “I love you.”

Tony froze, stopping by the door. His hand hovered over the door knob, realising what Peter said. He took a deep breath, words spinning around in his mind.

He was never, ever, good at this whole thing. This ‘thing’ being love. His father never showed it to him.

He had been good to Peter before. But, now... love being put into the equation? He wasn’t sure how his mind could figure that out.

He shook his head, trying to get rid of those protruding thoughts. He turned back around to Peter, brushed his hair out of his face and smiled.

“I love you too, kiddie,” he whispered. “I promise that I’ve got your back, Petey-Pie. We’ve got this. Before we know it, life’s going to be normal again.”

## Things Aren't Always Perfect

### Chapter Notes

TW- Slight mention of an attempted sexual assault + minor character death (including children).

"Just so you know, Parker," Tony said, when the boy walked into their lab. They hadn't been able to see each other since Tony dropped Peter off at his apartment and it had been a whole week. Tony really missed his kid. Peter looked at him, confused, so he elaborated. "I totally heard you say 'I love you' the other day."

Peter's face turned a deep red, walking behind one of the new robots in the room. He pretended as if he wasn't there, terrified that Tony was about to laugh at him.

"Peter, my heir, my child and my son, can you get out here, please?" Tony asked, sat with his feet up on a chair. "Kiddie, I mean it. Or I won't give you some of Pepper's lemon drizzle."

Peter poked his head out from behind the machine, awkwardly looking at Tony with a nervous smile. He walked with his head hung low, walking slowly to the man. "I totally didn't say that."

Tony smiled, leaning back in the chair, "Come here, kiddie. Come sit with your father and we'll have a deep, and long, conversation about how much he loves you too."

Peter sat on Tony's lap, putting his arms around him with a smile. He looked at the holograms, seeing what his 'dad' was working on. "You really do?"

"Do you listen to what I tell you? Kid, I've told you so many times how much I care about you. Is it really that hard to understand that I love you too?" Tony explained, "Well, to be fair to you, I'm an emotionally stunted man... so, I did totally freak out when I heard it. Had this whole 'back and forth' thing with myself, but I can't kid myself, Pete. I love you, loads and loads. There. My father never said to me, so... I'm breaking the cycle."

"And people say I ramble," Peter giggled, "But, seriously, that was nice of you to say. I love you too, Tony. Even if I said it first."

"Oh? Was this a competition? I wasn't aware," Tony smiled, whilst taking a sip of his coffee (awkwardly trying to grab it from around Peter).

"Well, you owe me. I expect a chocolate bar on my desk by five," Peter said, shrugging his shoulders.

"A chocolate bar? Peter... I'm a billionaire. Go for a Tesla, or something," Tony said, rolling his eyes.

"I don't exploit my father," Peter said, poking his tongue out. He jumped down from Tony's lap, making a bee-line over to Dum-E. He said hello to the robot, apologetically saying 'no' to its offer of a... suspicious looking smoothie. "Plus, Tony! I've got everything I've ever wanted, you know? I've got a family who loves me. What else do I really need?"

Tony smiled, standing up and walking over to where Peter was stood. He gave him a small hug, not knowing what else to say. His kid was just too pure. He wasn't sure if someone so good could exist, but he proved that they did.

Tony remembered a time before his relationship with Peter. He was grumpy, one drink away from being an alcoholic, and alone. The only people he talked to was Pepper or Rhodey, too scared of his own feelings to converse with his team.

Then, Peter Parker waltzed in. At first, he only started to become more sociable to prove this boy was a devil. But, his mind kept telling him.. that it was because Peter was a son sent down from above to him. An angel with no wings... (or, well, a person).

As soon as he let himself love this kid, everything in his life was better.

"Kiddie?" Tony asked, hours later when the teenager was hunched over his screen. Peter's head turned, allowing him to continue. "Just wanted to ask you something..."

"Yes? Are you going to ask it?" Peter asked, turning around on his spot with a smile. Tony's face had an emotion to it that he didn't recognise. It looked a bit like... apprehension (?), maybe even nervousness. It put Peter on edge. "Tony?"

"It's not even that big of a question, uh, I was just talking to Pep and we decided that maybe you should swap intern departments... You could come work with my lot? Play with all the sciencey stuff?" Tony said, fidgeting with his pen.

"Tony! That would be awesome!" Peter grinned. "Are you sure that Pep would be okay with it?"

"She's the one that suggested it," Tony shrugged, "So I assume that she is... and if she isn't? Then she has betrayed me. A lot."

From that moment on... Peter was now Tony's intern. Pepper took the change well. She understood that Peter's love was for building, not public relations (which was why she suggested it in the first place)

But, Peter wasn't just Tony's intern. He was more of a scientific partner. Sometimes Bruce would join them, and they called themselves the 'science bros' (Peter said it was a weird name at first, but he totally loves it now). They'd make things, speak about their projects at dinner to annoy the rest of the team, and they'd try and make new discoveries that would change the world.

It was perfect, until it wasn't.

It was a Wednesday night, which meant Tony and Pepper were the guests at the Parker's apartment. Ned, Johnny and MJ came over as well, as Tony offered to buy them all takeout for a premiere of a new film.

Tony tried not to look when Peter cuddled up into Johnny's side as they watched the movie, confused why nobody could see how obvious their budding romance was.

But, he also noticed something else. Peter was quiet. Uncharacteristically quiet. To the point where he hadn't heard him speak since dinner was served. It was very, very, odd and Tony didn't like it. At all.

Tony glared as Johnny pressed a kiss against the boy's lips, as they thought they were alone in the kitchen. Tony was in the doorway, a glass in his hand (which he was supposed to put some water in). He cleared his throat, walked passed the teenagers that were making out, and put some water in

his cup.

“Stay safe,” He mumbled, secretly giving Peter a wink (which, apparently, wasn’t so secret after all). He turned on his heel, getting out of the room to try and give the couple some space.

However, he heard something that had him turning right back around. Johnny said something about the Spider-man merchandise they had around the kitchen, saying something like ‘he hasn’t been around in a while’, but then Peter replied with “I think he’ll be back. Soon.”

Oh no he won’t, Tony thought. When he saw Johnny had walked out the door, he grabbed Peter’s wrist (gently. He wasn’t a monster), pulling him aside.

“What’s this about Spider-man making his return?” Tony said, cringing when the boy looked at him just like he used to do before. He looked angry, like Tony shouldn’t have heard this conversation.

“Don’t,” Peter said, trying to walk around Tony. Tony’s arm stopped him, making bubbling frustration in his stomach grow. “Leave me alone, Tony. I know what you’re going to say and I don’t want to listen to it.”

“Hold up, buckaroo,” Tony told him, frowning, “There’s no need for all of this attitude, kid. I’m going to tell you what I’m thinking and, yes, you are going to listen to it, because it’s important.”

“I don’t have to do anything,” Peter spat, pushing past him. He walked into the living room, sat down next to Johnny and turned his face away from Tony as he followed in.

Peter curled into Johnny’s side, focusing too much on the dirt of his fingernails than the film playing out in front of them. Johnny’s finger rubbed a circle into Peter’s palm, as he whispered something in his ear. Something that Tony couldn’t hear (which, in turn, made Tony anxious).

Tony blinked, trying to figure out why Peter’s mood changed with him so suddenly. He looked over at Pepper, who looked oblivious to everything else going on. He sighed, flopping back on the sofa (as his genius mind tried to figure it out).

Pepper had to leave early. Stark Industries emergency, apparently. A car came and picked her up, and then another came for Ned, MJ and Johnny. Tony sat there, alone with Peter, as May went to bed.

They sat in awkward silence, both of them trying to avoid falling through a pit of tense conversations. Tony tapped the coffee table, acting as if he was gently playing the piano (which, actually, he had been planning on teaching the kid anyway).

“I want to be Spiderman again,” Peter said, after a while. “I don’t feel... good, without it. I just want everything to go back to normal and I miss swinging through the city and feeling free. I don’t want to stay the sheltered person that I’ve become.”

“No, kid- I-,” Tony sighed, running a hand through his hair. “You can’t. Not yet.”

Peter rolled his eyes, throwing the blanket off him (in a way that could only be described as dramatic). He stormed off to his room, knowing he’d just flip out at the man like they used to if this continued. Tony didn’t seem to get the message, however, as he propped open the door with his foot before Peter could slam it.

“Fuck off,” Peter said, trying to smush the door closed to get Tony away from him.

Tony frowned. He knew it was the frustration talking and that Peter would end up regretting his attitude, but it still cut deep. Peter's chest was heaving up and down, as he clenched his fists again and again (again, he must've gotten that from May). When Tony barged through the door, he threw himself under his covers on his bed and waited for Tony to leave. But, he didn't.

"I said, go away!" Peter tried again, still underneath all the covers, and his voice got just a bit louder. "Leave me alone, I don't want to talk to you about this. I don't need your permission."

Tony sat down on the floor, facing the bottom bunk bed. Peter must've felt him there, as he immediately got up and took himself up to the top.

"Stop being so damn childish, kid," Tony snapped, his patience as thin as a small piece of string. "You're not going. If someone lays a hand on you, you have no idea what it might trigger in you! You could seriously hurt someone by accident. Or worse, you could hurt yourself! And I will not see you go through shit like that again, Peter. So, get down here and stop being so fucking stupid."

Tony's voice was strained. He couldn't do all of this again. He couldn't. His kid was broken, as much as he tried not to think about it. He just wasn't ready to put on the red onesie and go out fighting crime. They just had no idea what damage it could do.

Peter stayed still, just making Tony more mad by each second. "Fuck it. I don't care. Go out and there hurt yourself... Just don't come crying to me if you get yourself hurt. I don't want to see it." He turned on his heel, pushing away the guilt as he heard the faint cry of his kid.

He stopped himself as he put his hand on handle of the Parker's front door. He couldn't leave like this. They hadn't had an argument in so long, and he didn't want to do it all again.

Peter needed him.

Or, well, was it the other way around? Because Peter was his son, at the end of the day. Well, he wasn't. Pepper was the one he loved. He was probably just pretending to care, feeling pitiful for how long he was searching for him.

So, he took his own words to heart. He wasn't going to be there to see Peter's body crumble again. He took a deep breath, pushing the door open to go and jump in his car and drive back to the tower.

He just wasn't going to think about it.

Peter walked down Midtown tech's hallways, head down. His friends were all there, but he just didn't want to speak to anyone else. Tony's words were still circling his mind, teasing him. Telling him that he wasn't worth it. That their growing relationship of father and son was nothing but a fleeting moment.

Parker luck, he thought, as he turned to his locker. The sound of someone opening the one next to him made him flinch, taking himself out of his body for a second.

The pain was eating him from the inside. He heard a bang (it was his textbook dropping from his hands, even if he didn't know it then), and dropped to his knees. His head fell forward and hit part of the lockers, as he tucked his legs into his arms and started crying.

He knew that people were watching, all of them whispering that he was kidnapped. That he had PTSD. That he was crazy. That they expected Stark to show up soon.

He closed his eyes and he was back in a memory he begged Wanda and Strange to take from him. They refused.

He remembered how his hands clenched around the older man's neck. His name was Felix, and his name was fit so well. He was happy, cheerful, and his only crime was trying to take down HYDRA. Felix was a young father, in his first year at the FBI. His kid's mother had just left them, and he had sole custody.

Spider kicked down the broken, wooden, door. The lock shattered, allowing Peter easy access. His whole body was covered head to toe in tactical gear, his hands holding two automatic weapons.

Felix immediately put his boys behind him, shivering badly as Spider stalked forward. His face had been emotionless, as he shot this man in front of his children.

HYDRA had said something about leaving no witness behind, but Spider couldn't bring himself to take more from these children. He looked at Felix, made sure he was dead, and moved on to the next mission.

The first thing he did, after reuniting with everyone, with his memories back, was look up those children. They died from starvation next to their father, found only a week or so after Peter went in and took their dad's life.

He cried so hard that night, but everyone assumed it was because of his own torture. None of them realised the atrocities that he committed with the company. Being Spiderman meant he could atone those sins, saving people instead of taking their lives.

It wasn't just Felix that lived in his brain. Tens (hundreds?) of screaming people, trying so hard to run away from him as he killed. As he put a gun, or a knife, or a hammer, or anything he could find, to their bodies. The light in their eyes, leaving. But it did nothing to the Spider. He just kept going.

For Peter, however? He had all of their voices in his head. Everyday. Every, single, stupid night. He couldn't sleep, or breathe, or walk without a scream, a cry, or someone begging stopping him in his steps.

He just needed Tony. As soon as he got into Tony's arms, everything seemed to be normal. He'd close his eyes tight as Tony stroked his hair, mumbling words to calm him down. But Tony wasn't here now. Peter was sure that he hated him.

He blinked, seeing an outline of a person in front of him. He tried to smile, expecting to see Tony in front of him (like he always did). This time, however, it was Coach Wilson.

"Peter?" His teacher asked, hands hovering over his shoes. "Can I help you up?"

Peter nodded, tearfully reaching forward to stabilise himself on Coach Wilson's outstretched hand. He took it, stood up, and tried to run from the scene. His teacher caught up, however, taking him down to his office.

"I don't want to talk about it," Peter said, crossing his arms (secretly wiping a tear that was hanging stubbornly to his cheek). "I really don't."

"I imagine you don't, son," Wilson sighed, leaning back in his chair. "But I'm afraid I'll have to persist. School protocol, and all."

"Fuck protocol," Peter mumbled under his breath, blushing a deep breath when he realised who was sat across the room from him.

"I'll ignore that. That's our secret," Wilson said, and he kept that same 'bored' voice that he used

in class. He knew that the man looked legitimately concerned, but he really needed to work on using the right tone of voice. "Come on, man. If you don't tell me.. then I'll have to call one of your emergency contacts and call a meeting. I know Stark will be here in a flash. You know, he really gave us a scare last time. We thought one of our students was about to get kidnapped by an Avenger."

Peter's breath hitched when he heard Tony's name. He curled into his seat, putting his head into his hands. He bit his bottom lip, hard enough to make it bite. "Don't want to, I don't- please don't make me-,"

"Peter?"

Peter's sobbing got louder, his body wrecked from how hard he was crying. He squeezed his eyes shut, his chest hurting from the pressure in his stomach. He kept repeating 'no', but he wasn't even sure why. He needed to go out as Spiderman, and he needed to go now.

Wilson was on the radio with the principal in the other room, Peter could hear the frequency from where he was sat. He knew Coach left the second he started to sob, wanting to get a professional on the scene. He took this as an opportunity to run.

He climbed out of the window, dropping down to the floor. His legs went on auto-pilot, taking him over to his apartment. He jumped inside, grabbed his first suit (when he couldn't find the one's Tony made). He changed into it, grabbing his web shooters and just getting out.

He climbed to the top of the tallest building, laying down on the roof. He did a bit of cloud gazing, before his eyes began to blink slowly. He closed them, drifting off into a deep sleep.

Peter dreamt of repulsers. Loud. Metal. Lasers? He dreamt of how it felt to save someone's life, instead of taking it. He dreamt of how Tony had saved his life, all the way back to when he was only eight years old. How he shouted. How he loved. How he was... fully alone.

But, out of all it, those stupid repulsers was what was making the most noise. So, so, loud. He felt someone touching his arm as the noise got louder, making him flinch back. He felt his legs dangling, squinting his eyes shut as he prepared himself to fall. However, strong metal arms lift him from underneath his armpits instead.

"Peter? Shit-," He heard someone say, and finally... Tony was back. But when he opened his eyes, it wasn't the man he expected. Rhodey, or War Machine, was staring back at him.

"I know, you weren't expecting me," Rhodey whispered, tucking the boy up against his chest.  
"But, you're okay. I've got you. Lets take you down, huh? Is that okay?"

"Yes, sir," Peter mumbled, leaning his head against the metal (pretending it was Tony, meaning no offence to the man that saved him).

When he was put down, his feet felt a bit like jelly. He almost fell over, but he was stopped by Bucky. Bucky was grabbing him, pulling him into a tight hug. When he pulled away, Peter frowned. He looked so worried... how long had Peter been out?

"Tony?" Peter managed to ask, feeling guilty that he didn't say thank you first (he'd change that, later).

"He sent us your location. Started looking the second we heard you ran from school. 6 hours ago," Bucky explained, wrapping his coat over the boy's shoulders. He took the mask off, putting it in his own pocket. "He's just being stubborn, Peter. Don't let it hurt you."

“Thank you, Buck,” Peter whispered, holding him so, so, tight. “Thank you.”

“Peter, what’s up? Sweetheart, we were all so worried about you,” Bucky said, as they pulled apart. He took Peter’s hand, making him look up as he squeezed it tight. “I love you, little one. We just want to see your big smile.”

“Tony hates me,” Peter whispered, breaking down. “I want Tony. I need him, please. Please tell him. I’m sorry, I love you too, but- I just- I need my dad.”

Rhodey looked away, biting his lip. The words cut through him. The last time he saw Tony was only one hour ago. The man was in his lab, of course, with a glass of whiskey in his hand. He had drunkly cried over Peter, begging his best friend to go and find his boy. To take him home. He needed him to know how stupid his words had been.

“He’s, uh- he’s a bit, um, drunk right now,” Rhdoey told him, “But we can drop in?”

Peter winced. No, he didn’t want to see him like that. In fact, why did he even want to see him? His heart was beating, forcing him to go and hug his father figure. His brain, on the other hand, was telling him to walk away. To listen to the words that Tony said to him the other day. To not go crying back. So, he simply shook his head. He looked at the group, before collapsing back into Bucky’s arms. Bucky’s name fell of his mouth, over and over again. Just begging for him to make him feel better.

“My little Peter,” Bucky whispered, rubbing his back. “I know what’s going on in that head of yours, it’s happening in mine too,” he said, as he rubbed his back. “You’re not alone, Petey.”

“Not alone?”

Bucky’s heart broke. “Never, kid. God. Never.”

A week later, Peter was sat in his bedroom. Headphones in his ears forced loud music into his head, as he stared blankly at the wall. His phone buzzed, but Peter didn’t care. Because it wasn’t Tony on the other side.

He sighed, breaking away from his trance. He tentatively took his phone in his hand, reading over the message. Ned. It simply read ‘guy in the chair?’ Peter thought about it for a second, before sending back a thumb emoji. He was going to do it this time. Tony didn’t care, so he didn’t have any opposition. He was going to do it. Properly this time.

He put his suit on, calling Ned through the airpod that was previously playing some ACDC (it reminded him of his father, even if his head was telling him to stop). He jumped out of his window, just webbing around the neighbourhood for a while.

For the first time in a while, his smile started to grow. A genuine smile. He sat on the side of a building, looking out on the skyline. He was moments away from telling Ned about how beautiful it was, before his friend interrupted and told him that some crime was happening near by.

Dark alleyways were also creepy. But when you fought crime? They were more than just creepy. They were what nightmares were made of, really. He jumped from the building, walking over to where Ned said the crime was happening.

A man, probably close to 6ft, had his stocky hands wrapped around a younger woman’s neck. He had her pressed up against the wall, and one hand was trying to undo her blazer. Peter saw red. Immediately. Something in his past came to him, something that was also on the edge of his brain. Something he didn’t want to think about.

Peter rushed forward, smashing his fists into the side of the man's cheek. He got on top of the man, throwing hit after hit into the flesh. The man was struggling, trying to fight back, but Peter was strong. It wasn't until he heard heels tapping against concrete, that he let up. The girl had escaped. He did it. He-

A fist hit him in the gut. Peter groaned, falling back on the street. This time, the man had the upper hand. The fists came up to his cheeks... even his neck. His whole body. Peter's body went limp. He didn't care. It made him feel something.

It wasn't until he felt blood from his mouth, that he felt like he should step back up. Jumping up, he got the man off him. He webbed him, called the police, and left with pain over his whole body.

It wasn't until he was sat on another rooftop, that Ned spoke up. His voice was quiet. Scared. Nothing like Peter had heard before.

"Peter? Did y-you get that man—?"

"Bye, Ned. See you at school," Peter replied, coldly. He hung up, shoving the earbud in his pocket.

Peter, in so much pain, felt his feet taking him to the Avengers tower. As he got in the elevator, taking him up to the Avengers floor, he ripped his mask off and looked into the mirror over the walls. God. He looked terrible. Blood dripping down his chin, bruises over his eyes and cheeks. Eye bags from lack of sleep. Red eyes.

The doors pinged. He turned around. Eight adults stared back at him, all of them with varying looks of concern. Tony, however? He looked distraught. The second they made eye contact, Tony dropped the pan he was holding. His, already small, smile dropped and his face went from anger, to stress and then, finally, to a state of depression.

"Peter?" Someone asked. Peter wasn't sure who it was.

"Help me," Peter said, before the pain got too much. He collapsed.

He woke up in a hospital bed. He groaned. When he opened his eyes, Tony was staring down at him. Finally. He struggled in his bed, trying to reach out for the man. Tony stopped him.

"Kiddie," Tony sighed, taking a deep breath. "For fuck sake, Pete. I-," He ran a hand through his hair, bit his lip, and closed his eyes for a second. He looked like the picture of stress. "I told you-fuck, I begged you to not do this. I didn't want to be in this position. I didn't want to see you in a bloody hospital bed, Parker. And now? Look at you? You're damn lucky that you don't have a broken nose."

"Ju-Just wanted to- to be normal," Peter stuttered, "Tony-," he whimpered, "Please don't hate me."

"Hate you?" Tony said, sitting down in his chair. He grabbed both of his hands, kissed one of his knuckles, and leant his forehead against it. "How on earth could I do that? Peter, I'm sorry for saying that I didn't care. I just- I couldn't go through this. I'm so mad, kid. I'm so mad that you didn't just listen to me."

"Ma-Mad? I saved that person's life, Tony! I'm not going to apologise for that. They would've been, well-"

"Peter, no offence, but I don't give a crap about anyone but you at the moment," Tony interrupted, letting go of the boy's hand. "I need to leave, before I say something that I regret. Just know that I do love you, Pete. No matter what we say."

“Don’t leave, Tony!” Peter begged, trying to take his hand again. “Don-Don’t, please!” He cried, sobbing as he saw Tony’s back leave. The door shut and Peter just started to cry louder. “Tony!” He screamed, “Please!”

Tony put his back against the wall, breathing in and out. In and out. In. Out. Just trying to breathe properly. Peter’s crying was all he could hear, as he cried and screamed for him to just go back in. But, Tony couldn’t. He couldn’t look at Peter and see bruises and blood. He couldn’t. Not now.

“What on earth are you doing?” Pepper shouted, as she turned the corner. “He needs you, Tony!”

“Pepper,” Tony said, shaking his head, “I can’t. Please, just- just go in and hold him. Please, Pep.”

Pepper’s face relaxed, turning from pure anger to understanding. Still, she wasn’t happy. She walked through the door and immediately cuddled into the boy. He was gasping and crying, holding her as tight as he did when Ben died.

God. Her kid has been through so much. Too much for her to think about. She pressed a lot of kisses to his head, trying to get him to calm down.

Tony slept in his lab that night, curled up in his favourite chair. He shut down all of his projects, not caring one bit about any of them.

Peter snuck out of the hospital and ran into his apartment, sleeping in his bunk bed. He didn’t care what his face looked like, or that he looked like he had just been smoking (his eyes were very, very red). He just couldn’t be around Tony right now.

“Fuck, Peter,” Johnny said, the next day, when he walked in. He put a hand over the bruise, frowning when he saw a little bit of dried blood.

“Got mugged,” Peter mumbled, walking past his boyfriend (hopefully). He went to his locker, grabbing some of his books. Johnny’s hand slipped around his waist, pulling him in. Peter let himself relax. At least something was normal.

“Jesus, baby. Hope you’re okay,” Johnny whispered.

“I’m not sure if I am, but maybe we can pretend to be now,” Peter sighed, taking his boyfriend’s hand to try and forget about everything else going on.

Everything kept going wrong in Peter Parker’s life, to the point where he believed it was cursed. Maybe he was just destined to suffer. Maybe it was all he’d ever feel. There were moments that he felt as if things were going good, but they’d always come down. He just couldn’t relax.

Maybe one day he’d be happy. But today? Today wasn’t that day.

## **Therapy, Apologies And Embarrassment**

Peter was sat down beside a lake (a lake which was down the corner from the Avengers tower), dipping his foot into the stream. His back leant against the bank, his eyes fluttering. He closed them, taking in the fresh air. The fresh air that he craved for, which he needed to feel safe. It told him that he was free. That nobody was ever going to take that away from him again.

Pressing his hand against his temple, Peter winced from the burn of the bruise. He bit his lip, sighing greatly to himself. He just wanted to feel... happy, but he couldn't. He felt nothing.

"Petey-Pie?" Someone said, and Peter wasn't so sure if the familiar voice was actually attached to the person he wanted to see. "Bud. Look up at me, would you?"

Leaning back, Peter flickered his eyes up. Tony. Tony was stood there, hands intertwined together. His hair wasn't as perfectly pressed as it usually was. He wasn't wearing a suit, just a black shirt that showed off the faint glow of the arc reactor and jeans that were most likely made for him. He looked nervous, as if he wasn't sure he should be there.

Peter turned his head, looking back to the river. He moved his foot, making the water splash around the movement. Tony walked over and sat beside him, propping his hand just behind Peter's back. Peter immediately, although subconsciously, leant his head against Tony and cuddled up into his side.

"Tony," he simply said, stress immediately dissipating up from his body. "Tony", he repeated, not quite knowing why he said it.

Tony put his hand on Peter's shoulder, squeezing it tightly. He leant over and kissed his cheek, the movement coming easily to him. He pulled Peter closer to him, as he wrapped an arm on the boy's waist.

"I love you, Tony. I'm so sorry," he whispered, putting his face onto Tony's shoulder, "So, so, sorry."

Tony was confused. He wasn't sure why this boy was apologising so much. He put a hand on his back, rubbing comforting circles. Continuing to press fatherly, comforting, kisses over his face, Tony told him there was nothing to say sorry about.

"Don't say sorry, baby," Tony said, "I'm the one that needs to say it, kid. I was scared and I said horrible things to you. I care about you so, so, much. I love that you come to me when you're scared, or hurt. You're my boy. I hate that I said all that stuff to you, Pete. I'm so sorry," Tony was saying, his rambling getting out of control. "I'm so sorry. God, I hate myself for what I said to you. I hate that I left when you needed me, when you were screaming for my help. I just.. walked away and I-,"

Peter gripped onto Tony, twisting a bit of his shirt into his hand. He closed his eyes, shaking his head over and over again. "No, no, no," he repeated, letting Tony rock him back and forth. "You're not- not, you-you- don't need to apologise. Please. Tony- I was stupid and-,"

"No, Pete. You were not in the wrong. You just wanted to be yourself, buddy. You just wanted to go out and help and I flipped out," Tony sighed, "I should've just- just been there for you, in a different way. I should've got you some training, or something like that. But, kid, I-,"

"Tony," Peter said, for what felt like the hundredth time that day, "H-How come you freaked out

so much? I-I just don't understand it, really."

Tony took a deep breath, his eyes flickering down to a spot on the grass. He squeezed the boy's hand, trying to figure out how to say it. "Pete- you've got to understand something... my, uh, my dad wasn't a good person. I get scared whenever I have to do something as a father figure, because he wasn't a good man to look up to- and you? You're just this perfect kid and I don't want to fuck it up-,"

"You're not going to-," Peter told him, "I care about you, Tony. I know you're nothing like your dad. You've just got to trust me, please. I'm not going to do what you want me to do, always. But you've just got to be here for me, okay? That's all I want."

"I will, kid. I promise. I care about you too," Tony said, "Now should we go back to the tower and beat Clint on mario kart? He's become way too confident since you've been gone..."

Peter nodded, giggling. So, Tony distanced himself away from the teenager, pushing himself up from the spot they were sat on. He leant over, picked the kid up, and took them away from the river.

As they stepped inside the building, Peter took a deep breath in to smell the building. It didn't smell free, like the river had, but it smelt like home. He didn't need to be by the river bank to know he was safe, or to know that he was free from HYDRA. All he needed was Tony, who smelt like expensive aftershave and motor oil. Really, he wouldn't want it any other way. Never.

Peter knew that Tony didn't believe what he said. Terror made you say stupid things and that was all the argument had been. Both of them were just scared of what could've happened. Well, what did happen.

That evening, before Peter went back to his apartment, the two boys sat on the Avenger's couch and forced the team to watch three Disney films. As Peter left, he heard Tony yell at Clint to just stop singing. Perhaps it wasn't a good idea to introduce that to Barton. He just smiled, jumping into the back of the car that Happy was driving.

Maybe, just maybe, this is when life was going to get better for the damaged boy. He prayed for it. Tony prayed for it.

Peter walked through Midtown Tech, his head low as he tried to hide the bruises over his face. He knew when people were coming towards him, as he tapped into his spider senses. It wasn't until somebody's hand touched his that he looked up. Johnny looked at him, smiling, and kissed his cheek (just above the bruises).

"Peter?" He asked, pulling him aside to a secluded area of the hallway. "I've been looking into finding the people who mugged you, but I haven't found anything-,"

Peter bit his lip (he quickly regretted that, as it started to sting). He looked at his beautiful, caring, boyfriend, and tried to think of an excuse. He couldn't, so he just tried to stop him from doing anything more. "Don't worry about it, J. Lets just go to class."

They walked until they made their way inside gym class (which, unfortunately, Peter had to do now). He jumped into one of the cubicles, got changed, and walked out in the gym hall in a record amount of time.

What he didn't expect, however, was to see his coach standing side by side with Sam Wilson. Apparently his coach was brothers with an Avenger? He couldn't judge. Not really. He had a secret

double life..., so it wasn't too out of the ordinary for his teacher to have a famous brother. That he happened to know. Well, he knew him through connections. But, hey, Steve always did mention him, so he had to be pretty friendly with the Captain. And he had seen him a few times, but had never had a proper conversation.

Peter took his spot next to Ned, glancing over at Johnny. When he saw what they were doing, he groaned. Rope day. It wasn't that he thought it was hard... in fact, after the bite it was super easy. He just couldn't be bothered to fake his strength (it really took a lot out of him, surprisingly). And Sam being here? His mind was really distracted.

They all lined up, everyone attempting to make it to the top. One of the other students did, after quite a long time. Others, however, made it up half the way, or even a quarter.

Peter gulped as it was his go. He heard his and Flash's friends laughing at him, calling him 'Puny' Parker. He wasn't going to let it get to him. He put his hands on the rope and lifted. Making eyes with Sam, he noticed the pitiful look. Before he knew it, his head hit the ceiling with a bang.

He looked down, as he stuck to the rope, and stared at all of the student's shocked faces. Sam, MJ and Ned were the only ones in the room that didn't look as surprised. Was that pride he saw in Sam's face?

"Well, Peter- wow," Coach said, chuckling at his wrist watch, "You've made it in record time."

"Oh," Peter said, voice strained, as he dropped down from the rope. He looked over his friends, shrugged awkwardly, and joined the rest of the other kids.

"Peter, wait, come back-," Coach Wilson said, "Come here, we've got to celebrate what you've just done."

"I'd rather not," Peter said, ignoring the disappointed look of his coach.

Sam, however, took him aside. He put his hand on Peter's lower back and walked him into his brother's office.

"So, I should've guessed that the missing kid that my brother told me about was you," Sam said, as he closed the door and waited for Peter to take a seat. "You gave him a massive scare when you ran the other day, you know? You're not going to be able to do that today."

"Sam, I-," He sighed, "I-I had just argued with Tony and I wasn't in the mood for it all. I'm fine now."

"Looks like it," Sam said, grabbing the second chair in the room. "Look, kid, I've worked with a lot of people with PTSD. And, you? You're a picture of it. You need help."

"I don't- I- Tony already makes me some anti-depressants- I-,"

"Peter. Everyone doesn't stop talking about you. They all love you... like, a lot. You've got Steve and Bucky wrapped around your finger. And if you are just like Tony, like they say you are, than I know how far this stubbornness goes. But, damn, kid... you really need help for all of this. You can't just go through life like this. It's not healthy, or safe, for you or the people around you," Sam explained, shaking his head. He put his hand over Peter's clenched fist, waiting for him to look up. "How about I set you up with one of the brilliant therapists I know?"

"Therapy?" Peter whispered, biting his lip, "Really?"

"Yeah. It'll help you get back on your feet again," Sam said, gently smiling at the teenager that every Avenger loved. He understood why they loved him so much, even in such a small conversation. He recognised that the teen's eyes flickered over to the door, and he instinctively knew that he was silently begging to get outside. "Ah, kid, there's more one more thing I gotta ask you..."

"What? Is it your new suit? Mr Stark and I are testing a whole load of them! I have so many ideas for it and I-," Peter started, his eyes wide and sparkling.

"No, no, no," Sam chuckled, shaking his head. Damn, this kid was like looking at an aged down billionaire he knew. Exactly alike (he really was shocked to learn they didn't like each other originally). "I mean, thanks kid, but that's not what I wanted to ask you. I just- those kids in there, were they bullying you?"

Peter sighed, the previous wonder leaving him. His shoulders slumped and his smile dropped. He just looked through the glass pane of the office, thinking about how much those kids teased him. Constantly shouting and screaming at him, telling him how stupid he was or, even, pushing him through the hallway. But if it wasn't him, they'd turn to someone else. And he a hero... he'd seen a lot more than some teenage bullies. That's why he let it continue.

Sam was looking at him, glaring as if he was trying to read Peter's face. Weirdly enough, Sam was positioned in the same way that Steve sat during those stupid PSA's. Sam would be a good Captain America, maybe, one day (if Steve wanted to step down from the title). His clenched fist was supporting his jawline, his eyes flickering over Peter's strained (and almost scared) face. He didn't bother to say anything. Peter would open his mouth when he was ready.

"Well," Peter began, chewing on his bottom lip to try and distract himself from everything else going on in his head. Sam wanted to reach forward and stop him, to tell him appropriate ways to deal with stress, but he stopped himself. "Yes? Sort of, but Sam... I can deal with it. Really, I can. They'd just stick to somebody else if it wasn't me. So, yeah."

"Pete," Sam frowned, "Just because you're a superhero, it doesn't mean you can't be hurt. Emotionally, too. It's not right for them to bully you. Have you told your teachers?"

"Sam, please, just leave it," Peter said, "I promise that I'll think about it, but not now. And, please, don't tell Tony about any of this. He'll just freak out and when he freaks out, I freak out."

"I won't. Just take me up on that offer for the therapy. Okay?"

"Yeah, I will. Thanks Sam."

Peter leant forward and, very, awkwardly took the man into a short hug. Sam gave him his number, both professional and personal, and lead the kid back into the gym (where Johnny was now climbing the rope).

Johnny looked down at him, winked, and reached the top. Good thing it was cold, or Peter would've had to start fanning himself. Peter scurried over to Ned, standing almost behind him to shield himself away from anyone's gazing looks.

The rest of Peter's school day was quite mundane. Just the normal, every day, sort of afternoon. Apart from some weird looks, it went past without any more bumps in the road.

Unfortunately for Peter, Ned had an appointment at the dentist at 2.00. This meant he had to leave early, and it almost meant he left him. So, as the last bell went, Peter grabbed his backpack and

groaned to himself about walking home on his own. That was until Johnny's arm wrapped around his waist, pulling him into a not-awkward side embrace (juxtaposing his early hug with Sam).

"Hey, baby," Johnny whispered in his ear, causing a trail of goosebumps down his arms. "I missed you," he added, whilst pressing a kiss to Peter's shoulder.

Peter giggled, finally relaxing. He leant his head back against Johnny's, "Hey," he smiled, "Do you want to hang out at my apartment with me? It'll be just us."

"Ohhh," Johnny chuckled, his voice a lot deeper than Peter had ever heard it before. He definitely liked where this was going. "How could I say no to an offer so wonderful?"

Peter smiled, walking along the path to his apartment with Johnny's hand in his. They laughed at an inside joke most of the way, before they started making eyes at the other as they approached the apartment door.

Peter put the key in the lock, oblivious to the fact that it was already open. He blamed Johnny for that, as the kisses on his neck was distracting him. The door opened, both of them fumbling awkwardly around each other's body as they kissed each other (hard).

Johnny giggled into the kiss, pulling Peter down on top of him. Peter sat on his lap, wrapping his arms around Johnny's neck. Johnny's hands tucked underneath his shirt, teasing the sides of his torso. His hands stroked his sides, before he squeezed them.

Peter squeezed his eyes shut, tight. His lips parted gently, allowing Johnny to push his tongue into the other's mouth.

Wow, Peter thought, this was perfect. Nothing could stop how he felt. It was almost as if he floating in the air. That was until a loud crash tore them apart.

"Holy shit, did not expect that," Tony said, his hand missing the coffee cup he was just holding (Peter was totally going to complain to him later, when he got over the embarrassment). "Hello kiddos."

Peter jumped from Johnny's lap, leaning back against the sofa. His face turned a deep red, the flush covering every piece of his flesh. He straightened his clothes, awkwardly coughing underneath his fist. Johnny, bless his heart, looked mortified. He was staring at one spot of the wall, not daring to look over at Tony (who looked as if he was one moment away from cracking up into the biggest fit of laughter).

"Tony?!" Peter groaned, "What are you doing here? I-I thought nobody would be here?"

"Parker," Tony chuckled, jumping down into an armchair that matched the sofa the boys were sat on. He glanced over the boys, shaking his head with (another) chuckle. "So you thought you could plan this little rendezvous? I'm quite proud of you, Petey-Pie. Getting there- you know- getting down and dirty," Tony winked. "...You've got a bit of a blush there, boys."

"Oh god," Peter grumbled, putting his head in his hands, "Would you just stop talking, Tony? Please, please- stop-"

Tony whistled underneath his breath, "Well, I never answered your question," he added, "I thought I'd come and pick you up for a day of bonding, but it seems you were doing some bonding of your own." When Peter glared, he chuckled, "Sorry, couldn't help it." He turned his attention to Johnny, "I seem to recall us having a little chat about honest intentions with my son-,"

"Tony, seriously!" Peter said, a hint of laughter coming out as he spoke. "Johnny and I are going on a date," he said, as he looked over at the teen, "So, I'll hang out with you later. Stalker."

Tony smiled at him fondly, grabbing a wallet out of his pocket. He shoved a hundred dollars in his boy's hand, before rushing out of the door with a wave (also, shouting 'spend it wisely' as he went).

Peter looked at the bills in his hand, shaking his head. The door swung to a close, leaving Peter and Johnny alone in the room again. Johnny finally looked away from the spot of his wall, eyes relaxing. He let out a deep breath and started to laugh.

"I can't believe I just got caught making out by Tony Stark," He said, leaning back on the sofa. His back hit the blanket over the piece of furniture, pulling Peter on top of him. "But, baby, you're so, so, worth it."

Peter's embarrassment from the last few moments suddenly went, as he leant his head onto Johnny's torso. "I hope so."

"Hey, Pete," Johnny said, putting one finger on the end of Peter's chin. He pushed his face up, so that they were eye-to-eye, licking his lips. "You are."

"You're just saying that..." Peter blushed, trying to face away.

"Maybe I'll just show you how true it is..." Johnny whispered, "How about you show me your bedroom?"

"R-Really?" Peter gulped.

He hadn't done... anything with anyone before (unless you counted... one time, which he didn't at all). Well, the most he had done was making out. With Johnny. He didn't have any experience and he didn't want to embarrass himself. But this was Johnny. He'd take care of him..

"If you want to..."

"Lets go," Peter said, jumping up. He took Johnny's hand and pulled him into his room (hoping nothing too mortifying was in view).

The door closed behind them with a bang and whatever followed was very, very, good (in Peter's opinion).

Peter kept his promise with Tony, heading straight to the tower the day after. The whole team was there, each of them trying to take up Peter's time. They tried to hide their jealousy as the boy hovered mostly around Tony (it wasn't their fault that the man grew to be his father). Sam was there too, obviously, and Peter finally felt good enough to take up his offer.

Therapy was good. Very good. He spoke his heart out to the person (who signed a lot of NDA's). He was nervous for another person to find out about his identity, but that thought quickly passed. He felt himself feeling happy as he let it all out. Finally letting someone else know how hard it was to be him... it was like massive weights were taken off his shoulders. Big, massive, weights.

A weird, protruding, thought crept on him. What if he just told the world his secret? Tony did it and he was fine. But would it put him in danger? Would it put his family in danger? He just wasn't too sure.

He couldn't stop thinking about doing it. Just letting it go. His therapist told him that he should do

what makes him feel good, but he wasn't too sure if revealing his identity to the world was a good choice. In fact, he said he shouldn't make spontaneous decisions such as that (without talking to someone who knew him).

But it would just be easier. A lot easier. Maybe Flash and his stupid friends wouldn't bother him.. if they knew what he could do. He'd be able to walk through the halls with his head high, everyone moving out of way for the superhero that fought for their lives. Maybe he'd become popular (which, actually, was a con for revealing who he was). Maybe...

There was a lot of maybe's. A whole load. With every 'maybe', he wasn't sure what the answer was. He had no idea how it would end up, but he dreamt that it would be good.

He hadn't asked Tony yet. He knew what the man would say. He'd say no. Definitely. He'd look at Peter as if he was crazy and Peter wasn't sure if he could take that.

But, his therapist tried to get him to speak about it. So, one month after his first appointment, Peter found himself stood outside of Tony's lab door nervously. He hadn't been this nervous since the first time he came down here. Knocking gently on the door, he waited for FRIDAY to just swing the door open. And she did.

Tony was hunched over his car, wearing well-fitting jeans and a loose black tank top. And, wow, Peter hadn't seen those muscles before. Go on, dad. He walked up to the man, sitting down on 'the Peter chair' (Tony didn't let anyone else sit in it, making Peter feel very happy whenever he did).

"Hello," he said, his usual energy gone. Tony noticed immediately, of course. He dropped the spanner he was using and turned around, a trail of oil dripping down his forehead (gross). "I'm fine, Tony. Just wanted to speak to you about something."

"Oh my god," Tony mumbled, shaking his head. "Did Johnny get you pregnant? I can't believe it! Congratulations!"

Peter rolled his eyes, leaning over to pick up the dropped cloth. He hit Tony over the head it, before crossing his arms. When Tony faked a gasp, offended, Peter responded by laughing. "I'm trying to be serious here, you idiot."

"Ow!" Tony groaned, rubbing the back of his head, "No need for violence. I'm cutting off your allowance, boy."

"Tony, you don't give me an allowance," Peter chuckled.

"I don't?" Tony asked, dropping down into \*his\* chair, looking at Peter with a tilt of his head. "Hmm, I should change that." He looked up to the ceiling and bit his lip, "FRIDAY? Set up a direct debit of 250 dollars a week into Mr Parker's bank account, would you?"

"Tony!" Peter squealed, "No! You can't do that!- I don't want to take your money!"

"Billionaire, Peter," Tony said, ruffling the kid's hair with a chuckle, "Also, I can do what I want. I'm Tony Stark, kiddie. Thought you learnt that already."

FRIDAY did, in fact, set that direct debit up. And the first payment went through immediately. Peter immediately tried to transfer it back, but Tony just sent that, and some more, back to Peter again. Peter gave up at that point, pouting at Tony.

"Least I know I'll be able to afford college," Peter said, underneath his breath. When he saw a glint of mischief in Tony's eyes, he sighed. "You're already planning on paying for my college, aren't

you?" When Tony nodded, Peter just smiled to himself. Wow, Tony really did care about him.  
"Thank you."

"You're very welcome, youngling," Tony smiled wide, "Soooo," he drawled, waiting for Peter to wind his mind around all the money and back to their original conversation, "Why did you come into your old man's lab? Was it just a little visit?"

"No, uh, I wanted to ask you something. It's probably going to make you mad," Peter bit his lip, not really wanting to get the conversation back on track. "Um. Okay, here goes.... I think I want to reveal my identity."

Tony went silent. His beaming smile immediately dropped. A frown replaced that smile, and then, after all of that, it flickered to a state of confusion.

"Woah, okay," Tony said, mainly to himself, "That's really not what I expected, kid. Are you sure? Because, kid, I don't think you are. Do you know what it'll let out?"

"You did it..." Peter mumbled underneath his breath, dropping his gaze to the tiled floor.

"Because I'm a stupid adult. You, however, are still a minor. You've also locked up a lot of dangerous people, Pete. Dangerous people that'll want revenge."

"I know... it's just, well... it felt so good to tell my therapist about it and I, um, thought it would be good to let everything out to a lot more people...", Peter explained.

"Hmmm... a therapist is a lot different to the world, Petey-Pie," Tony shook his head, biting his lip. He looked as if he was trying to make up his mind about something, closing his eyes. When he opened them, Peter was still not looking at him. "But... if you really want to... then Pepper can set up a conference."

"Really?" Peter asked, his eyes immediately falling to Tony's face. "You'll let me do it?"

"I don't control you, Mr Parker. It might be a stupid idea, in my opinion, but I'll help you with anything you do. So, if you want to tell the world that Spiderman's a little shithead... then go ahead. Be my guest."

That's how Peter found himself dressed in a suit, minutes away from telling a room full of reporters that he was Spiderman. This was going to be a crazy day.

## A Best Man

Oh shit. Peter definitely hadn't thought this whole 'identity reveal' thing through. He stood in a waiting room, pacing back and forth as he waited for Pepper or Tony to come and grab him. Checking himself out in the mirror, he gulped. Oh no, no, no- he couldn't do this- he couldn't-

His, frankly justifiable, freakout was stopped by Bucky and Tony walking in. Bucky rushed over to him, putting his metal hand onto the teenager's hand, pressing his flesh one against Peter's forehead (he was either trying to check his temperature or read his mind). Tony hovered over the other side, sorting out his tie, jacket and hair (and when did Peter get two fathers?). Tony was the doting father, whilst Bucky was the over-protective 'papa'. Steve was the loving step-father and Pepper was the beautiful, stunning, step mother that took no shit from anyone (not that he was implying Bucky and Tony had been married, but it was just what it looked like).

Tony was studying his face, clenching his fist. He wrapped an arm around Peter's waist, making sure he was okay, as he tried to figure out what Peter's forlorn face meant.

"Would you stop?" Peter asked. He turned away from them, pushing himself back into the desk as he started to, well, spiral.

His mind was a furnace and Tony and Bucky were desperately trying their best to put the fire out (that totally made sense in his mind right now, but... his mind was also considering standing in front of a bunch of reporters as Spiderman. So, really, he wasn't sure what to think). With a dramatic sigh, he stared at Tony, who just sighed in relief in response. He could tell what Peter was thinking.

"I didn't even say anything," Peter told Tony, who was saying something that sounded like 'thank god' in Italian. "But, I'm sorry- I can't do it and- I know you spent a lot of time organising this and-"

"Oh, Pete," Tony sang, pulling him into a very tight embrace, "I'd give Hammer a billion dollars if it meant we didn't have to do this. Did you know how scared I was?"

"But you let me think about doing it?" Peter said sheepishly, using one free hand to pull Bucky into a hug. "Thanks both of you."

Bucky smiled, "No, thank you kid. You saved my life."

"Well, you did save mine too, Bucky," Peter grinned, a bit of his breath escaping him as Mr Stark squeezed just a little bit tighter. "And you, Tony. Thanks for being my family."

Tony pulled away, letting Bucky cuddle into him more. Tony snapped a quick pic, before noticing Peter still looked a bit dishevelled. He frowned, asking the kid what was up (still).

"What are you going to do now? They've all come here to see something.. So we can't just leave them empty handed, you know," Peter whined, tugging at the blazer's sleeves that were just a little too long for him (despite Tony's constant nagging, he said no to getting a custom made, tailored, suit, for the would be identity reveal).

"Don't you worry that genius heard of yours, my boy," Tony grinned, with that mischievous 'I've got something planned' smirk that everyone knew usually came before a bad idea. This one, however? It wasn't bad at all.

Pepper Potts walked onto stage, only minutes after hanging up on May Parker, with an aura of beauty and grace. Her long, strawberry-blond hair followed her as she walked. She wore a body-con, dark blue, dress that just oozed professionalism and classic beauty. Her lips were painted a deep red, a deep red that Tony always associated with his beautiful, patient, girl.

The only other person on the stage was Tony Stark. Tony, who was dressed in his own dark-blue outfit. The blazer fit him like a glove, showing off a little bit of curve to his torso. A smile played on his lips, which was an opposite to his Pepper (who looked as if she was a moment away from bursting). Which, to be fair, was understandable. Nobody told her Peter wasn't going ahead with his reveal and she was incredibly frustrated that he wasn't up with them yet.

Tony grabbed a mic, putting his 'media' face on. Turning to Pepper, he winked, before he started to speak. "We've got big news for all of you today. Very, very, big news that I hope everyone's going to take to," he looked over at Pepper with a smile, "Everyone."

Tony walked over, taking his girlfriend's hand. Someone in the crowd gasped, making Tony chuckle underneath his breath. However, nobody else was making a noise as Pepper Potts looked at the eccentric billionaire with hope, and excitement, in the way she grinned.

Now, Tony was an old man. An old, old, man. But, he could still make it down to his knees. Preferably, just one of them. He took to one knee, grabbing a beautiful velvet box out of his blazer pocket. Opening the box, the spotlights flickered onto the stone and made it look like a fairytale.

A 14-carat diamond stone was in the middle of the white band, creating such a bling that might've blinded both of them if they weren't careful. It was large, but pretty, and cost about one million dollars (which was barely a dent into Tony's wallet). But, it was everything Pepper wanted.

"Pep- I know this isn't the most romantic thing in the world, but... you make me the happiest man on planet earth. You keep me safe. You encourage me. I just, god, I love you. So, will you marry me?"

Pepper nodded, one single tear coming from her eyes. She barely let out a yes, before Tony slipped the ring on her finger. She helped him up and kissed him, resonating with happiness that she was finally engaged to the man of her dreams. Her soulmate.

Flashes of cameras surrounded the room, whilst the two love-birds kept to their own bubble. They looked at each other with big smiles. Pepper was crying and, as Tony looked over her shoulder, he realised Happy was too (he always knew the man was a big softie). Next to Happy was Peter, who was clapping widely at the proposal. If it wasn't for that boy, he wasn't sure if he would have ever had the courage to do this. What a life.

The team gathered in the common room, once again, to congratulate the happy couple on their engagement. Peter was stood with Loki, asking the God all about Asgard (as Tony went around speaking to everyone else). Both of them were happy, far away from suffering they had endured. Life was just... good, for once.

Peter went into a broom cupboard to get his jacket, feeling the cold air creeping through open windows. When he saw Thor's hammer pressed up against his outerwear, he groaned. Picking it up with one hand, the teenager was very surprised with how light it was. He walked through the room, jacket on, with the hammer in his hand. He barely noticed how everyone stopped talking as he passed.

He put the hammer in front of Thor, leaving to the kitchen to get a glass of water for himself. As he returned, Peter was met with looks of shock. "What?" He questioned, a bit confused from all the

attention, “What is it? Do I have something on my face?”

Thor’s face was the picture of shock, as Tony started cracking up in the corner. Walking over to the teen, he wrapped an arm around his shoulder and raised his glass in the air. “To Pete!” He bellowed, which just made Peter even more confused.

“Tony? What’s going on?” Peter asked, his face screwing up, “It should be to you, not me?”

“Pete,” Tony smiled, “You’re worthy!”

“I-What? I don’t understand-?”

“Do you recall the story of Mjonir I was informing you about?” Loki said, looking nervous that he was speaking up, “Only those who are worthy to lift this hammer, will. Young warrior, that’s you. You can rule Asgard, if you’d please,” the man explained.

“Woah,” Peter whispered. His face looked shocked, but then turned into something mischievous. Tony gulped, as the teen pushed himself away from his grip and grabbed the hammer. Before Tony could ask what was happening, he put it in the billionaire’s hand and watched him fall to the floor. “Sorry!” He said, in between fits of laughter, “I just had to try that!”

“Oh, you little shit,” Tony grumbled under his breath, whilst simultaneously laughing. He made eye contact with Pepper, who smiled at him in a way he hadn’t seen in a long time.

His life was just perfect.

Tony was so happy when he found out Peter was going to therapy. But... when Sam told him that his kid was getting bullied in plain sight, Tony was not happy at all. He stormed down to the school, during school-time, and forced the principal (he did fund the school, after all) into a very important meeting.

Sitting in the small office, Tony tapped his foot against the floor as he waited for Peter to show up.

Peter was in Biology when the intercom asked for him. He looked at Ned, confused, but took his bag towards the headmasters office anyway. When he saw Tony sitting in one of the chairs, his heart sank. What had he done now? Apparently something bad... if Tony was in his school.

“Peter, sit down. Don’t worry, you’re not in trouble,” Mr Morita said, gesturing to the open seat that faced his desk.

Tony’s face was... angry. Really angry. His fists were screwed up, his eyebrows furrowed. But, this anger? It wasn’t directed at Peter. It was directed at the principal. Peter was getting more and more confused by every passing second.

“So, Mr Stark... uh, called this meeting,” Mr Morita said, sheepishly, as he rubbed the back of his neck as if he was anxious. To be fair to him, who wouldn’t be anxious about Tony Stark staring them down.

“My kid is getting bullied, Jim,” Tony explained. Peter slumped in his seat as he spoke, flushing red. Obviously that meant Sam had told him the truth. Peter was embarrassed, not wanting the man to know this was happening to him. “And I don’t like that. I really don’t like that. So... please tell me why you didn’t know about this? And how kids can get away with it underneath your charge?”

“Uh-well, um-,”

"No. I want to know. I don't want excuses," Tony said. Peter tried to turn him his way, but he refused to move. He wouldn't look away from 'Jim'. "Peter's my son, Jim. If you don't sort this out, soon, then, well- you'll see the wrath of Iron Man coming down your halls... but, I don't think you like that, right?"

"Um, no- I, okay- Peter can you tell us who's bullying you? Because, Mr Stark- I ensure you that we'll get this sorted out right away," Jim said, sitting down on his seat. His head was hung low, sitting in a way that made him look the most scared he had ever been.

When Peter was silent, Tony finally turned to look at him. "Peter, tell him. Please."

"I- uh, Flash Thompson and his friends," Peter mumbled. Firstly, his words were so quiet that neither of the adults could hear him. So, Peter said it again.

As Peter revealed who it was, Tony let out a laugh. "Flash? What sort of name is that? Ridiculous. Get them here, Jim. Also, their parents. I have some words."

That's how Peter found himself in the office, stood behind Tony's back. He stood hand in hand with the man, as Flash, his friends, and all their parents walked in. He tried his hardest to look at them all, but he was just so scared.

"What's this for?" Flash Thompson's dad, Mayor of the town, said. He looked confident, as if he was the most important man in the world. But, as he locked eyes with Tony Stark, he swore underneath his breath and bit his lip.

"Your son and all his little friends are getting expelled," Tony explained, enjoying the frightened looks of the kid's parents and kids. "As they're all a bunch of bullies, bullying my kid."

"You bullied Tony Stark's son?" He heard a parent whisper, followed by a scowl and a disappointed shake of the head. "Idiot."

"I won't let my son get expelled. I do a lot for this school!" Flash Thompson's dad bitterly laughed, staring at Jim and Tony.

"Buddy, I'm Tony Stark. Richest man alive. I think I can do a lot more than you," Tony smirked. "Peter's the kindest kid on earth, and your kid 'Flash' decided to ridicule him day in and day out. And if they don't get expelled, I'll send an email to every college in America that says 'Don't enrol this child'."

"Tony..," Peter whispered, tugging on his arm. "Don't let them get expelled, please. Suspension will be fine."

"Pete? Are you serious?" Tony said, frowning. "There's no way-"

"Remember when you promised to be here for me? Tony, I don't want to ruin their lives for stupid mistakes. Just- this is enough... and if they do it again? Then I'll let you do this, but- come on, please," Peter begged.

That's how Tony got all of Peter's bullies suspended for a week or so. That's also how Peter manipulated Tony into taking him out for some ice cream.

Peter would always be astonished at how far Tony would go for him... always. He really did love him.

Wedding planning was a lot more stressful than Tony could've ever imagined. Yes, he hired the

best planner in the business... but, still, there was just so much to do. Suit shopping, suit shopping for Peter, dress shopping, flowers, menus and everything else.

One thing that wasn't hard was choosing the duo that were going to be Tony's 'best men'. Rhodey was an obvious choice as his best friend since MIT and Peter, his son (Pepper chose May as her maid of honour; Natasha, Maria, Jane and Carol were her bridesmaids).

Asking Rhodey was easy. Just a simple question over dinner and all was good to go. Peter, however? Tony knew how worried he'd be. He had to make sure the boy knew he'd make a good best man (and second bodyguard, if Happy needed a break to cry at the ceremony.)

So, Tony's operation 'best man' plan commenced. He took the kid out on a walk by the beach, letting him use all of the change in his wallet to try and win a plush in the claw machine (he did, he won a little Hulk teddy). Then, they went out in a little cafe that Peter had mentioned off-hand once. They stepped inside and got the table that Tony knew was Peter's go-to (if the photos of him and Ben there had anything to say about it). So far, so good.

Peter was tucking into his sandwich, when Tony decided it was a good idea to bring up the question. He waited for Peter to finish the bite, when he spoke up. "So, kid, have you had a good day?"

"Suspiciously good," Peter said, taking a sip of his orange juice, "What are you planning?"

"Just wanted my kiddie to have a good day," Tony said, winking. He took a bite of his own sandwich, which Peter swore by, and raised his eyebrows. Good. "But. I do have something to ask of you."

"Oh no," Peter took a deep breath, still smiling, "Am I in trouble?"

"Nope. But, should you be? You came to that conclusion very quickly," Tony laughed.

"Nope!"

"Anyway," Tony smiled, "Sooo, I'll just say it. How do you feel about being one half of my best men?"

Peter bit his lip, in an attempt to stop himself from getting too excited and rushing around the cafe accompanied with loud screaming. He grinned, nodding enthusiastically. "Yes! Yes, of course!"

"Brilliant, bud. I'm glad you said yes," Tony grinned, as Peter rumbled in his seat and excitedly mumbled to himself.

"I love you, Tony," Peter grinned, "And I love Pepper, so it's a no brainer! I'm going to get all the groomsmen matching ties and-and- I'll make sure all of the flowers are perfect and I-,"

"Baby-," Tony laughed, laying his hand on Peter's, to make him look up. "Calm yourself down, okay? You're going to be great. I trust you to make all the best choices for our wedding. I know you've got it."

"Your trust astounds me, but I shall do my best," Peter saluted, already planning a ceremony in his head.

Johnny came as Peter's plus one, as Tony was too proud to invite him. He didn't want his kid to remain defiled. But, still, he liked the kid, so he wasn't too mad. MJ and Ned got an official invite, as both of them (well, Johnny too - if he was being pedantic) helped Peter to plan, so it was a given

that they'd come too.

The wedding was gorgeous. Set up in an old building, the ceilings were tall. Beautiful vines crept up the white brick, making it look a bit like a forest. A beautiful wooden floor set the scene from the ground, covered in chairs for the countless of guests who were attending. By the alter was a huge chandelier, picked out by Peter personally, that created the entire ambience of the room. Tony was very, very, proud of his boy's choices.

Pepper? Pepper looked ridiculous. Ridiculous as in 'I can't believe how beautiful you look'. The designer of the dress was British, flying over to the States just to give Pepper a personalised fitting experience. It was simple, but perfect. An ivory colour, the fabric seemed to fit like a glove against Pepper's body. An open, ish, back, was covered in the longest veil. The dress itself was covered in lace, but in the most appropriate places. It was sleeveless, held together by two spaghetti strands that fell just inches away from her collar bone.

Her hair was tied in a loose bun, stands of it falling over her face. A red lip, of course, was applied and was added to enhance the warm tones she had on her eyes.

The best men wore dark grey, checkered, blazers with matching trousers. Underneath the jacket, and above the shirt, was a matching waistcoat. Brought together by a red tie, both of them looked so good. Tony couldn't stop smiling.

Tony himself? He wore a black, fitted, blazer which was accompanied by a gold flower pinned by his chest. The gold tie matched the flower, falling above the grey waist coat that he had underneath the jacket. Peter said he looked really handsome as they took their fifteenth (already) mirror selfie of the day (and that count didn't include regular selfies), but Tony couldn't help smiling in every single one.

"I'm so proud you," Rhodey said to him, when it was just them in the room.

Rhodey had seen him through everything bad in his life, through every drink and tough-spot, his best friend was always around the corner. He loved him, and he always would.

"Thanks, man. I love you," Tony said, knowing, now, that he should always tell people how he felt, otherwise it would blow up in face.

"Love you too, kid," Rhodey grinned.

Yeah, he still called him 'kid' after all this time. After a kidnapping, multiple invasions and life, Rhodey still saw Tony Stark as that bright eyed fifteen-year-old kid in the middle of their dorm room. And, even if Tony never admitted it, he loved the nickname.

The girls were having just as much fun. The bridesmaids wore light pink dresses, the same colour as the groom's men's ties. May wore an red flower on her dress, matching the colour of the Iron Man suit (and more importantly, the ties of the best men).

They helped Pepper get ready, all of them gushing over how beautiful she looked. Because, wow, she really did. Tony was definitely going to tear up as she walked down the aisle.

Tony did a lot more than just 'tear-up', Peter saw his mentor crying as soon as he was allowed to turn around and look at his fiancee. Peter was in awe of the whole ceremony, never wanting to take his eyes away from anything. The way those two loved each other was beautiful, like a heat wave burning through their hearts. It was always warm when they were together and Peter liked to sneak in and take advantage of the comfort, as both of these adults loved him just as much as they loved

each other (just, of course, in a different way).

The ceremony slowly shifted into the after-party. Peter hadn't seen the Avengers drunk before, and this was something else. He watched as Thor, drinking Asgardian mead that only he could manage, danced across the floor, Jane in his arms, as he bellowed words that everyone heard and laughed about. Peter watched MJ, Johnny and Ned talking, all of them looking as if they were having a great time. Steve and Bucky were slow dancing somewhere, even if the song playing was fast pop. Clint and Natasha were off somewhere, but they were both incredible spies, so Peter couldn't find them.

Peter sat in the corner of the room for a second, taking a deep breath. He thought about how different his life was, when looking back at the previous year. HYDRA took him, forced him to be someone he wasn't, and made him feel as if he was constantly seconds away from drowning. His family, however, made him feel as if he was floating in mid-air, happy and free from everything that happened to him. Sometimes he just needed to stay still and process that, to remind himself that he was strong.

"How come you're not dancing, Pete?" Rhodey came up to him, sitting down on the empty seat beside him. He had two plates of cake in his hand, passing one over to Peter as he spoke. Peter gracefully accepted.

"Just needed a breather," Peter replied, his eyes dropping in on the bride and groom.

Tony's hands were around Pepper's waist, guiding her through the floor and dancing with her like it was just those two in the room. Tony was smiling, which Pepper returned, and it just made Peter feel so good inside. He couldn't tear his eyes away.

"Ah, I get it," Rhodey replied, taking a bite of his cake. He grinned around the mouthful, apparently finding it delicious. "You okay, though?"

"Yeah, I'm fine. I really am," Peter told the truth, smiling down at the cake in his hands. He made eye contact with Johnny, deciding that he should probably go and re-join society. "Shall we go and dance, Uncle Rhodey?"

"You know that I can never say 'no' when you call me 'Uncle,'" Rhodey agreed, locking arms with the teen as he walked him over to the dance floor.

Rhodey and Peter danced together, listening to the music and partying with vigour and excitement. Some other Avengers joined them after a while, all of them wanting attention from the boy that stole Peter's heart.

Sam brought him aside, after some dancing, and told him he needed to talk. "Just wanted to let you know that I only told Tony about the bullying for your sake. I didn't want to- well, take away your trust. Just wanted to make sure everything was okay..."

"No, I get it," Peter replied, smiling. "Thanks, Sam. You helped. A lot. I never would've done anything about it without you... and I feel so much better now. So, yeah, thanks."

Sam's smile widened, knowing that he helped Peter out. He was glad that he didn't ruin the fledgling friendship between them, as he was just as besotted with this kid as the rest of the Avengers were.

Peter was about to rejoin Johnny when the DJ started talking, "Everyone gather around the dance floor to watch the father-son dance, please!"

Peter moved to the side of the dance, excited. Until he finally started to process what that meant. Tony didn't have a son- so did he mean him? Tony's eyes locked on Peter's, confirming what was going on in the kid's head. He awkwardly walked over, a bit of nervousness/stage fright growing as Tony put his hands around him.

Peter was already crying as the music started, over the moon to have someone so amazing as his father figure. When did he get so lucky? He leant his head against Tony's shoulder and swayed to the music. He bit his lip to try and stop himself from crying more, only letting go when he heard a sniff fall from Tony.

"I love you, son," Tony whispered, holding him tight (because Peter was here, and he wasn't going away ever again). "I love you so much."

"I love you too, dad," Peter whispered, not caring anymore about his calling his dad anything less. He wasn't Tony anymore. He definitely wasn't 'Mr Stark'. It was Dad... and he was happy for it to be.

Tony, apparently, was in a state of euphoria as he heard that word stumble out of Peter's mouth. The song came to a close, so Tony wrapped Peter up in his arms and held him in the air, grinning widely. He loved his family so much!

The rest of the ceremony went by without a bump. Until, as Peter danced with Johnny, the teenage hero saw something in the corner of his eye. A barrel of a gun, pointed directly at Tony. Peter immediately jumped up, climbed the ceiling of the room they were in, and towards this intrusion. Johnny and MJ, who didn't know he had powers, watched in surprise as their boyfriend and best friend stuck himself up there.

Hitting the man down, Peter jumped on the person and threw the gun out of his hands. Still, the only people that saw this was MJ, Ned, and Johnny. Ned, forever his biggest supporter, was cheering and grinning as MJ and Johnny looked terrified, having no idea what was going on.

Locking his arm around this man's neck, Peter made eye contact with one of the security guards that didn't see this man come through. He squeezed a bit tighter, until the team came running towards him with handcuffs to take this man away.

Peter was breathing heavily as they did, hearing Tony's familiar footsteps coming behind him. Then his familiar hand wrapped around his wrist, gently pulling himself outside of the building. "So? You took out an assassin at my wedding. Why didn't I expect anything less?" Tony said, with a grin.

Peter, sheepishly, looked to the floor. When he looked back, Tony was looking at him with... pride? "Well, I wasn't going to let him shoot you. So, I'm not going to apologise-,"

"Kid, I didn't ask you to apologise. I'm very proud and grateful. But, I imagine that your boyfriend must've seen you as I heard him ask Ned about how you 'climbed the ceiling'," Tony explained, looking over to the man who attempted to kill him (who looked very angry in the back of a police van). Tony gave him a little wave, used to people trying to kill him.

"Oh shit," Peter mumbled underneath his breath, "Sooo.... Shall I say that you make me sticky gloves or something?"

Tony let out a little laugh, patting his kid on the shoulder. "Go tell them the truth, Spidey."

So that's how Peter's boyfriend and second best friend found out about his secret identity. The

whole world didn't know, but his world did. They took it well, considering. And a lot more made sense when they did.

Overall, he had a pretty good day. Probably the best day in a long, long time (he was sure that Pepper and Tony would agree).

As people started to leave the wedding, Peter took Johnny for a walk down the nearby lake. They sat by the river bank, reminiscent of the moment Tony had apologised to Peter, and held each other's hands as the stream flowed.

Looking at the river made Peter feel at peace, again. Just the way it flowed and kept all that life, was something that made him relax. Knowing that life went on, no matter what, was good. It made him less non-existent, it assured him that although he was locked up before, time was still moving and he was still alive and here. Johnny was there waiting for him, Tony was waiting for him, and even the trees and the water waited. In essence, these lakes/rivers made Peter feel important. As everything had a purpose to keep the world spinning. Even him.

"Spiderman, huh?" Johnny had asked, still in shock. "I mean- it does make sense- I- just...,"

"You're just surprised?" Peter offered, smiling as Johnny nodded. "I know... it's a lot to take in. But, I love being him. I love it. But I understand if its too much-,"

"It's definitely not too much. I've said your worth it before, Parker, and I'm not backing off now," Johnny smiled, leaning in to press a small kiss against Peter's lips.

Peter jumped into Johnny's lap, playfully pressing him up against the grass bank. They made out for a while, until Peter's phone started ringing (Tony's ringtone). They fell apart, before waking back to the reception together.

It really was the perfect day and Peter Parker hadn't felt happier in years...

After chasing peace for what felt like all his life, Peter was finally able to sit back and relax. He was able to smile as the wind went past him, enjoying how the fresh air invaded his senses. He was able to enjoy the feeling of having a big family behind him. He was able to be happy, once and for all.

# Evil Hidden In Plain Sight

## Chapter Notes

(Very intense chapter incoming)

TW-

-Mentions of past sexual abuse, current sexual harassment, self harm tendencies and suicidal intentions

Peter should've known that he couldn't keep his identity in for long. He should've known that his quest for peace would take another dip.

Tired, Peter still went out as Spiderman. He didn't have Ned to tell him where to go, or who was behind him and his Spider-sense wasn't doing a good job.

Taking a rest, Peter didn't see the person walking up behind him. He didn't see the hand that crept to his mask. He only saw evil eyes, as the mask was torn away from him in a horrible, stressful, second.

When he saw who it was, Peter regretted even waking up that morning. He backed up into the wall, his hands shaking. There, stood in front of him, was Stephen Wescott. Or, uh, Skip. Someone who he had longed to forget. Someone who took everything away from him and laughed.

Skip was his old babysitter, coming to him when he was only eight years old. He took Peter's innocence in his hand, crushing it in his fist. He made Peter do things, things which he didn't even know existed. And Peter? Peter never told anybody.

"Oh, I knew it," the man smirked, staring at him with such horrible eyes that Peter recognised as the devil's. "I knew it. Little Peter Parker, huh? Who would've thought that he'd turn out as a hero?"

"Go away," Peter begged, eyes tearing up. He looked at all the available exits, trying to find a way to get out of here. He couldn't call on Karen, as Skip had taken her away (alongside the mask).  
"Please. Go away."

"Where would the fun be in that?" Skip drawled, taking a step closer. Peter squeezed his eyes shut, as Skip's hand fell to his wrist. "Come on, sweetheart, open those eyes for me."

Peter shook his head, digging his fingernails into the palm of his hands. "No, no, no- no," he said, shaking underneath Skip's gaze. "Please don't do this, please don't-,"

"Oh, we're just having a bit of fun- Einstein," Skip chuckled, "There's just need for all these 'no's', is there? Come on, baby, open those eyes up. Lets see if I can remember how to make them wide?"

Peter felt a wet tear trailing down his cheek, feeling Skip's leg between his own. He cried harder, hoping someone came around the corner. Someone like 'Spiderman' to take Skip away.

"Lets take some photos of that pretty face, huh?" Skip said, "Or- I'll tell your precious Iron Man

what happened between us two.”

“No, please- no- please, don’t do this. Skip, please,” Peter cried.

“You know I like it when you beg, Petey-Pie,” Skip chuckled darkly, rubbing his hand up and down Peter’s arm.

Great. Petey-Pie, Peter’s favourite nickname from Tony, was forever ruined for him. He knew that whenever he’d hear it, bile would come up his throat and his palms would become sweaty from fear. He wasn’t sure if he ever felt fear like this before, even when he was back in HYDRA’s grip.

Peter opened his eyes, coming face to face with icy, cold, blue eyes. His lips were parted, his irises dilated. Peter could still see how evil he was, from the way he stared. In his hand, his phone was open on the camera app.

“Don’t do this. I can’t- I can’t-,”

“Peter,” Skip smirked, putting a finger on his lips, “Stop talking, baby. Come on, lets take some photos. I want some- lovely photos- of Spiderman with his mask off. Do you know how much money I could get from them? If not, we could do... something else?” Skip giggled, putting his hand down Peter’s leg.

“Photos- I’ll do- photos, nothing else, please-,” Peter said, crying more. Skip stood back from him, crossing his arms and forcing Peter down to his knees.

After some photos, Skip got a kick in, and left Peter and the mask behind. Peter grabbed the mask, jumped up to the top a building he was on, and curled up into one spot and just cried. His knees hit his chest, as sobs wrecked through his body. He felt so dirty. Just one touch of Skip’s hands made him shiver, made him want to go in the shower until every piece of his body was scrubbed over ten times. But, for now, all he had energy for... was tears.

He stayed in the same spot, cuddled up into himself like a toddler who had just been shouted at. He didn’t move for such a long time, staying up on this roof top until the next day. To the point where he had been there for 12 hours.

May called Tony in bits, crying that he hadn’t come home. All of them were terrified that HYDRA had come back, but Tony easily located him and flew over. When he saw Peter, who had run out of tears, he was just... confused.

“Peter?” Tony asked, leaning down to pick the kid up. But, all Peter did was flinch away from him violently.

Mumbling “no, no, no, no-,” underneath his breath, Peter made sure he was at a long distance away from Tony. He opened his eyes, blinked to adjust to the light, and took the mask off to take a breath (showing off a tear stained face and red eyes).

“Jesus, kid. What’s wrong?” Tony tried, but all Peter did was curl up into himself more. “Peter? You’re scaring me here, Petey-Pie-,”

Peter’s head snapped up, “Don’t call me that,” he snapped, suddenly more alert. He got to his feet, stumbling as he did, as he put it on again. Before Tony could get another word in, he shot a web at a nearby building and swung.

He knew that those photos he took were going to be realised. Skip’s arm around his waist, a forced smile on Peter’s mouth. Peter on his knees, looking up at his rapist. Peter on the floor, skin

showing. Peter dropped to the floor, forgetting all about Tony behind him. He stumbled into an alleyway and threw up over the floor. “Shit, shit, shit-,” he grumbled, tears finding their way back to his eyes. He put a hand over his stomach, not knowing how to feel. He couldn’t go through this again- he couldn’t-,

His phone buzzed. Peter took it out and was sick again. Ned had sent him loads of question marks, with some screenshots of a news article. ‘Spiderman revealed’ was the headline. Peter’s back hit the brick, his head going into his hands. He had to get out of here....

Peter must’ve passed out, because he woke up in Tony’s arms. They were flying across familiar land, on their way to the tower. Peter couldn’t do that. He scrambled, trying to push himself out of Tony’s grip, but all the billionaire did was hold him tighter.

“Are you sick?” Tony asked, settling Peter down onto his sofa in the penthouse. “God, kid- you stink of vomit. Lets get you clean, huh?” Tony reached for the buttons of his shirt.

Before he could think about what he was doing, Peter leant forward and punched Tony around the face. “No, don’t. No. No. I said no,” Peter said, delirious. “Don’t. No.”

“Okay, okay- kid, okay,” Tony tried to reassure him, putting his hands by his sides. His cheek burnt, a lot. He tried not to show the pain in his face, but it didn’t work. He bit the inside of his cheek as Peter cried. “I’m not going to hurt you, Peter. Lets just put the news on and sleep-,”

Just as Tony put the TV on, the news reporter said the teenager’s name. Tony’s head snapped up, coming face to face with those photos he had tried to forget about taking.

“What the- Peter, what are they? Why did you...?” Tony said, in total disbelief that the world knew who Peter was. “Shit, kid-“

“I-,” Peter tried to speak, but his mouth went dry. His mind was just circling words that Skip said to him. He was scared that the man got to him again, even now that he was a lot older and strong. Peter finally understood how it felt to be paralysed by fear.

“Peter- I-,” Tony said, surprised that Peter would do something like that. “What the hell? I mean, kid- what,” Tony was at a loss for words, staring at the screen and then back at the kid. “So, uh, you were scared to reveal your identity at a press conference, but you go and take those photos with some random guy? I mean, come on- Pete-,”

All of Peter’s tears dried. He simply sat, unable to move, with his head facing the television screen. He stared, a broken man, and Tony was scared that he’d been replaced by some robotic clone. Tony turned the tv off, sitting beside Peter. Peter didn’t move.

“Kid?”

Peter’s fingernails were digging into the inside of his wrist, trailing down his flesh. Red lines were beginning to form, disappearing as quickly as they came.

Tony tried to move his wrist, but Peter simply jumped up from the sofa. He turned away from Tony, screaming. A noise Tony didn’t know how to deal with. He waited for Bucky to come in, because- well he assumed it was something to do with HYDRA. But even Bucky didn’t know what to do.

“No, no-,” Peter cried, before jumping out of the window, his web shooters attached to his wrists still. Tony watched from the window as Peter swung across the skyline, terrified and confused.

Tony went to jump out, moments away from calling his suit. However, Bucky took his hand and shook his head. "No. He's- he's not going to be responsive to anyone, Stark. Trust me, man, he needs to be alone-,"

"He doesn't need to be alone, Barnes. He needs me. He needs his dad- he needs-," Tony was delirious, trying to get himself away from the grip of Bucky's metal hand.

"Tony-," Steve spoke, putting his hand on his shoulder. "Come on, bud. It's okay. He's going to be okay."

Moments later, as Tony calmed down, they all sat around a circle as the billionaire tried to figure out damage control around the teen's identity. A Stark pen in his mouth, his tablet down on the table, Tony never felt so stressed.

"What the fuck is going on?" Tony said, mainly to himself. He turned to Steve, who looked equally as confused, and sighed. He shook his head, biting his lip, "He just came in and wouldn't, uh, he wouldn't respond so- so I turned the TV on and his identity has been revealed and he took these photos with this man- and that's not my Pete, you know?"

"I don't know- Tony, he- well, did it look forced to you? Because I know that Pete wouldn't ever let anything like that happen. And, well- did you see those photos, Tony? Did you really look at them? Because Peter's got Johnny and he's not the type of person to cheat-," Steve said, watching the billionaire's mind turning gears.

"Shit. You think he was forced? Fuck- that poor kid, and I- I tried to get him changed in some nicer clothes and he punched me- for fuck sake, of course. That makes so much sense. How didn't I see it?" Tony said, but he wasn't speaking to Bucky or Steve. His mind was working so fast, trying to figure out where Peter might have ran to.

Peter's legs took him to Ned's house. His best friend. He banged on the door, immediately crying as Mrs Leeds opened it. She took him into a bear hug, rubbing his curls with one of her hands. "Oh baby," she cooed, "I saw the news. How are you doing?"

"I didn't want to," Peter cried, shaking his head, "Didn't want to- Mrs Leeds- I didn't, please believe me. H-He forced me and I-,"

"Darling," Ned's mother frowned, letting him go. She took one of his hands and looked at his little, scared, face. "I believe you. Sweetheart, I'll always believe you. You know that, right? I'll go get Ned and we'll make you some awesome hot chocolate and everything will be okay. Do you believe me?"

Peter nodded, wrapping his arms around himself. He walked into the Leed's living room, sitting himself down on the sofa with a frown. He put his head in his hands, closing his eyes. He bit his lip, hard, and thought about how Skip's hands covered his and- well- how dirty he still felt. How- how horrible he felt. How much he just wanted to sink into a hole and hide away, knowing how inevitable his downfall was going to be. All eyes were going to be on him, every single time he went outside. He couldn't do this- he couldn't-

Ned walked in, grabbing him and pulling him into a hug. He held Peter in his arms, eyebrows furrowed as Peter's sobs wrecked his body. He rubbed a circle into Peter's back, knowing how much it calmed him.

"God- Peter, I'm so sorry-," Ned whispered, "I'm so sorry, buddy. I'm so-,"

“Ned,” Peter cried, his hands shaking. “Ned- it’s all out. What if they go after May? What if-if they go after you? MJ? Johnny? What happens then?” He tightened his hand around Ned’s shirt, crying into his shoulder. “I’m so sorry- please, please- I don’t know what to do. I don’t want anyone to hurt you- what do I do, Ned?”

“Peter- It’s okay, man. It’s okay. I’m safe. You’re safe. We’re okay,” Ned repeated, knowing how much Peter needed reassurance. “What happened, Pete? You’ve got to talk to us, please.”

“Skip- Skip- he-,” Peter gasped, letting go of Ned’s body. He sunk down onto the man’s sofa, curling a blanket around his shoulders. “He- fuck- I-“

“Skip? Your old babysitter? What’s he got to do with this, Pete?” Ned asked, sitting beside him. He took his hand and let the vigilante squeeze it. “Take a breath, Peter. You’ve got to breathe, okay?”

“He rap-he, well- he-,” Peter tried to say it, but the words just couldn’t come out. It was as if they were glued to his lips, holding on for dear life. Ned was looking at him as if he going to break, eyebrows furrowed, and all Peter wanted to do was get up and run away. Run away from anyone who knew him. Perhaps he’d jump on a plane to Europe, becoming a forgotten memory in the minds of the people around him. “Ned, he- he touched me and he-”

“Did he hurt you, Peter? Die he rape you?” Ned asked, and Peter was so confused from how easy it was for Ned to just say it. When Peter nodded, he was brought into another hug from his best friend. “God, man. Shit- I’m so sorry.” When Ned pulled back, he grabbed one of the tissues from the table next to the sofa and wiped the wet patch on Peter’s cheek. “Did he do it again today?”

“H-He didn’t- well, he didn’t- you know- do the ‘act’, but- but he did touch me and he- he threatened to tell Dad- I mean- Mr Stark about-about everything that happened and then he said he’d do it again if I didn’t take the photos, Ned. And I-I’m not sure what to do-,” Peter wasn’t sure if his words were even coherent, but he knew he just needed to get it out there- he just needed someone to know that Stephen Wescott was the scum of the earth.

“Oh god-Pete- we’ve got to tell Tony about it,” Ned said, making Peter’s heart beat fast- too damn fast. He shook his head a few times, begging Ned not to. He didn’t need another reason for Tony to take Spiderman away- or to be ashamed of him. What if never wanted to see Peter again after he figured out what happened? “Peter- we have to- someone needs to know and Tony can get the best lawyers on your case....”

“No- Ned- no- I don’t want him to know-I don’t, please- no-,” Peter begged, and he felt tired from how much he said ‘no’ that day, but it just kept coming up. Peter froze when he heard the sound on the Iron Man suit, his eyes going wide with fear. “Did you? D-Did you call him here?”

“No, Pete-I swear- I didn’t,” Ned said, “I wouldn’t do that to you-,”

“Peter’s just in here-,” They heard Ned’s mother say, before the living room door opened. Tony was stood in the doorway, out of the suit and into a blazer and shirt combo, combined with slacks that he was always wearing.

He looked at Peter, concerned, taking little steps towards where the boys were sat. Peter melted into the backing off the sofa, looking everywhere apart from where Tony was stood. He closed his eyes, tight, trying to forget about everything that was going on in his head.

“Peter?”

“How are you even here?” Peter whispered, starting to get a little angry. He let his eyes open,

blinking at the way Tony's face had dropped. "Do you have a tracker on me? Because- Tony- I don't want to see you right now and-,"

Tony hurt. He didn't want to be 'Tony' to Peter anymore. He wanted to be 'dad' and he thought that he was, but- alas- it had been too good to be true. "I just know you, Pete. I know that whenever you're too stressed, or scared, to speak to me that your next point of call is Ned's house...,"

"Tony- I don't-I don't want to talk about it. Not yet- please, I don't-,"

Tony made eye contact with Ned, who just simply nodded at the billionaire. He sighed, accepting that he'd just have to be there for the kid (like they had agreed to do before). "Okay, Pete. But that doesn't mean we're never talking about it, okay? But, for now, I'll just be here for you. Whenever you need me."

Peter got up, attached his arms around Tony's waist, and just sighed. His scent invaded Peter's nose and, yes, it made him feel safe. The familiar smell of the motor oil and grease made all of his feelings dissipate, putting him in a bubble of just him and Tony. Just for a second, at least.

When Peter first walked into the school, the first look he saw was wonder, than pity and then- well- was it humour? He heard people's laughter as he walked, people pretending to pose like him (only those who hated who he was). Some people came up to him and thanked him for a service, as if he had just finished serving in the military. It was weird for people to know his deepest thoughts, his deepest secret, and his whole body felt as if there was a harsh weight on his back.

"Peter?" Johnny said, stopping in the middle of the hallway. People watched and look, knowing the relationship between the two boys (they weren't really good at hiding secrets). "I-,"

"Johnny," Peter whimpered, blinking. He didn't know what to say. He didn't know- he- those photos looked as if had cheated and he didn't know how to face that. "Not here- I can't- I-,"

Johnny shook his head, looking down to the floor. He started to walk away from the other teen, but Peter caught his wrist. "Please listen to me- please- I-"

"No, Peter. No-," Johnny simply said, pulling his hand away from Peter's weak grip. He walked away and left the teen standing there, making the hero drop to his knees and cry as his fellow students just sat and watched.

Ned caught him, because of course he did. He took them outside and forced his best friend to take a sip of the cool water he made for himself in the morning. Wiping away Peter's tears, he frowned and pushed his curls out of the way. "He's just confused, Peter. Maybe you should think about telling him the truth, hm? Of course- I mean- you don't have to but-,"

Peter sighed, relaxing back into the wooden bench. He gulped most of Ned's drink, promising him that he would refill it later on. "I- I want to- but- I-," Peter stammered, head in his hands, "I just don't want him to look at me in any other way, you know? W-What if he thinks that I'm weak- o- or stupid?"

"He won't," Ned said, taking his seat next to Peter. He put his hand on Peter's knee, squeezing it gently. He sighed, "It's shit, Pete. It's so shit what's going on here, but- I know that he'd never see you any differently and, well- you need a win, man, because you've been constantly fighting for peace without avail. You need something good and, god- Pete- I don't know what that is...,"

Peter smiled, but, of course, it wasn't genuine. Tight and forced, his smile only played on his lips for a second or two. He looked at Ned, sighing. "Least I got you, huh?" He said, before gently

leaning his head on Ned's shoulder. "Thanks, man."

"You always got me, Pete," Ned whispered, "Always."

Peter took Ned's advice, walking in the late hours of the day towards Johnny's house. He walked with his head low, a snapback pulled over his face. He knocked on the door of the man's door, grimacing when Johnny opened it with a frown. His 'boyfriend' (Peter wasn't too sure if they were still together) looked around behind him, yawning whilst checking his watch. It was late. Very late. 12pm... to be exact.

"What are you doing here?" Johnny asked, "Jesus Peter- you could've been stabbed. Get in," He said, stepping aside to get Peter inside the house.

Peter's phone buzzed in his pocket, probably Tony or May calling his phone to see where he was, but he didn't care. He stepped inside Johnny's house, awkwardly hovering around in the kitchen.

"Are you going to answer me, Pete? I mean- really? It's late and we've got school and-,"

Peter interrupted Johnny's words, just coming out with everything stuck inside him. "I was r-raped, um, by the person who took those photos when I was younger. He threatened to do it to me again if I didn't take those photos a-and I'm so sorry- I didn't-,"

"Oh, Peter," Johnny frowned, his stiff body immediately melting. His shoulders dropped, the anger in face quickly morphing to pity. With a swift movement, he had Peter's hand in his. "This okay?" He whispered, only squeezing it as Peter nodded. "I'm so sorry."

"Yo-you don't have to apologise- I shouldn't have- I should've been stronger than him, Johnny. I'm Spiderman- I-," Peter said, his bottom lip quivering. He looked to the floor, ashamed with how he couldn't look Johnny in the eye.

"No- Peter- what? There's no- you can't say that-," Johnny whispered, "This is NOT your fault, baby. This isn't. The man that did this to you is an asshole and he doesn't deserve to breathe air, sweetheart. It doesn't matter if you're Spiderman, or not, he was scaring you and-and you must've been frozen," Johnny sighed, "Oh, man. You're so strong, Peter."

Peter let go of the wall in his head, shaking and tearing up again. But he didn't want to cry- he didn't want to show Johnny that he was just as weak as was in the moment. When he looked at Johnny's blonde hair, flashbacks of Skip's hands came back to him. He dropped Johnny's hands, scared out of his mind.

"Peter?" Someone called. In Peter's mind, he knew that it must be Johnny- but Johnny's voice morphed in Skip's and Skip's hands were on his body and Skip was taunting him and Skip-

Peter ran outside of the man's house, out into the dark night. He climbed a nearby building, sitting on the edge of a ledge. He let his eyes close, just thinking. He couldn't do this- he couldn't-

He just wanted to get out- to not feel any of this ever again. He stared up at the stars, trying to pick the biggest and brightest. Memories of his mother were vast, but he always remembered that she'd say the brightest star in the sky was your loved ones looking down from a spot in heaven. And, he hoped, that she was there.

He climbed a bit higher, so that he could lay on top of the roof. He spent ten minutes looking for the brightest star, zoning in on it as soon as he did. As soon as he saw it, he let his body relax.

"Mama," He whispered, "I miss you. I miss you all. Say hello to Uncle Ben and Dad for me, would

you?" He fiddled with his hands, not sure where to let them rest. "I don't know what to do, Ma. You know- sometimes I just want to let go and join you. I just want to see you- for you to let me know everything will be okay. I wonder how different life would be if you were still here. I hope you're proud of me, but I'm not sure if you would be. Mama, I love you- and I'm so sorry-,"

And, once again, familiar sounds of jets filled his ear. Of course he was coming, but Peter didn't care. He got up, walked to the side of the building, and stared at the ground. Would Tony catch him in time if he should let himself fall?

He was just... empty.

"I'm sorry," Peter whispered, before putting one foot over the edge to make himself fall.

## Comeuppance

### Chapter Notes

TW-

More mentions of past sex abuse, present sexual harassment/assault

“No!” Tony screamed, watching as Peter stepped across the edge of the building’s ledge. His heart caught in his chest as he put more power into the thrusters, by request of FRIDAY. His heart didn’t start beating again until Peter dropped into his arms. “Oh-no, baby- baby- no,” Tony cried, as he lowered both of them to the ground.

Tony didn’t let go. He wouldn’t, not when his kid just tried to jump off a building. He held this kid tightly to his chest, “Oh my god,” he whispered to himself, rocking Peter back and forth. “Oh my god,” he repeated, trying to make sense of what just happened.

“Dad,” Peter whimpered, “Dad, I’m so tired- I’m so-” He started crying, watching as his tears fell down the metal chest plate of the suit. When the face plate lifted, Tony had tears streaming down his cheeks. He looked... broken. “I’m so sorry,” he whispered, grabbing Tony’s metal hand.

“Baby,” Tony cried, not sure what to say. He didn’t know how to comfort him, to make sure the kid knew how much he meant to him. “Petey- Petey-,” he said his name over and over again, just to know he was alive. “You’re safe, dad’s got you. Dad’s going to make sure you’re okay.”

“I’m sorry, dad,” Peter cried, “I can’t feel- I’m so numb and I-,” he was sobbing now, tears covering Tony’s shoulder.

Peter’s whole body was shaking, clutching to every piece of Tony that he could. He didn’t want to die, he just didn’t want to feel anymore, but he didn’t know what to do. He couldn’t feel... anything anymore.

When Tony finally let go, Peter noticed easily how wrecked the man was. His face was screwed up, tears streaming down his face. He hadn’t looked this scared before and Peter just didn’t know what to say..

Tony leant forward, cupping the boy’s cheeks in his hands. Using his thumb to stroke above his cheekbone, Tony was still crying. He was mumbling something that Peter couldn’t understand, just looking at him to make sure he was still there. His wedding ring was cold to Peter’s cheek, but it was reminder that they were both still here and he was alive and-

“Never do that again, Pete. Please- God, I can’t live without you. You’re my son, Peter. You mean so much to me and Pepper. I love you, god- I love you so much,” Tony rambled, leaning forward to give him a kiss on the cheek. “Jesus, kid, I don’t think I’ve ever felt so scared.”

“I’m sorry,” Peter whispered, eyes meeting Tony’s. His bottom lip trembled, before his legs gave out from how badly they were shaking from the adrenaline in his body.

Tony caught him before he hit the floor. He held Peter bridal style, just he had done before, and closed his faceplate. Just like that, both of them were in the air and flying back to the tower.

Tony put Peter down on the sofa, not even noticing that most of the team were here still. He got out of his suit, which is when Peter realised the man was still in his pyjamas. Tony climbed onto the sofa as well, tugging the kid to him.

Peter was cold, too cold. His skin was freezing to the touch, like he had been outside for far too long. He had bruises all over his body, fresh and large. Tony assumed that he must've gone out as Spiderman earlier that day. He had scars in his palms shaped like fingernails, from how hard he pressed them into his skin. He just looked... small, a complete opposite to the cocky, sassy and stubborn boy he was when they first met.

God, the kid had been through so much.. and Tony had only seen the moments he had suffered over the last year or so. It wasn't a surprise that he thought about giving up. Thinking about it and attempting, however, was something very different.

"Thank you, Tony. Thank you for being here. Always," Peter whispered.

"You're welcome, kid," Tony replied.

Peter flipped himself over, so that their torsos were touching. He felt young again, like he was cuddled into Uncle Ben after his parent's funeral. His uncle holding him until their breathing was synchronised, until he could feel the adult's heartbeat through his chest.

It was a lot easier to feel Tony's heartbeat, with the whole 'spider-bite' thing going on. But, he could also feel the imprint of the Arc Reactor, the machine that gave his Dad the ability to breathe. It was just a machine, but it was also so important.

Peter remembered the feeling of Skip's hands over his... and he thought about how hard it had been to breathe. Maybe he needed something similar to what Tony had in his chest... or maybe Tony was his 'arc reactor', in a sense. Tony was the person that kept him breathing, the one that was always there to help him get back on his feet.

"I know that getting your identity revealed is scary, Pete," Tony finally said, "But you can talk to me, okay? Don't let your mind convince you to be alone, because you're not."

"Tonight wasn't about my identity, well.. it sort of was- but that is not the whole story," Peter whispered. He was going to tell Tony everything... part of it was the adrenaline, but he also knew that he needed to speak up. If not, he'd probably try to do what he did earlier again.

Tony paused, a little taken back. It wasn't? Then what the hell had Tony missed? What was going on in his kid's head that he didn't know? He was a shit father, he couldn't even tell that his boy was suffering..

"HYDRA?" Tony offered, only more confused when Peter slowly shook his head. "No? Pete, what happened to you?"

Peter's words stuck in his throat. He couldn't say it, no, not to Tony. Not yet. He bit his bottom lip, shaking his head. "I- I can't- I'm sorry, I thought I could say it, but-"

"Hey, buddy," Tony whispered, enunciating his breathing for Peter to follow. "Breathe, okay? You've got to breathe for me.."

And he did, just following Tony as he showed him what to do. He kept his breathing steady. In, out, in out- over and over again, until he was okay.

He still couldn't tell Tony. He wasn't sure why. So, he fell asleep. He knew that his dad would be

worried, but he just needed to come to terms with what was going on before he opened his mouth. Skip was still out there- he was still-

School was still hard, because of course it was. But, it was getting easier. He finally let his full athleticism show in gym, much to coach Wilson's delight. A lot of the kids asked to see his Spiderman powers, such as climbing the ceilings of the hallways. He became a bit like a circus freak, like he wasn't human-

Well, was he? He was a 'mutate', according to Ned. Someone who changed according to something that happened to them, such as the spider bite on his neck. He wasn't human, so- well, was it his obligation to be the 'wonder' that people desired? He just wasn't sure.

Peter was walking home from school when he saw Skip again. The man followed him to his apartment, freaking Peter out. When he tried to walk in with him, Peter put a hand around Skip's neck and slammed him across the wall. He couldn't believe he had his hands around the man, feeling more and more sick the longer he kept him there.

"Kinky, Einstein," Skip winked, his own hands flying to his, now bruised, neck as Peter dropped him. "Just wanted to drop in. Maybe we could take more photos?"

"No, no! Fuck off! I swear- I'll call Tony and he'll blast you to pieces!" Peter sobbed, as Skip pushed them into the apartment, away from any prying eyes. "Go away! Go!"

"Now, now- don't be such a prude. I've missed you," Skip cornered him, gripping Peter's thigh. "Come on, Petey- just want to feel you."

Peter's fight or flight kicked in. He stood tall, punching Skip across the face. Again and again, over and over. It wasn't until he saw the blood on his hands that he stopped. When he let off, Skip immediately ran out of his apartment. It wasn't until he watched his bathroom shut, that he started to cry. He threw up in the toilet bowl and struggled to clean his bloody knuckles before May came back from work.

Peter couldn't breathe, his bathroom light too sensitive to his eyes. He clutched the side of his bath, squeezing, as he tried to focus on other things except Skip. He was breathing in and out, trying not to remember it. So much so, that the bath was now bent from his touch. Oh well, they needed a new one anyway.

Movie night was something that Peter wasn't looking forward to. Prying eyes and hands that got too close to him. As he got to the tower, he also found out that Tony wouldn't be there. Apparently when you own a company with your wife, there will be times when you'll actually be busy. Tony did say he'd join them later, but for now- Peter sat himself next to Bucky on the edge of the sofa.

Tony did join later, approximately when they were half way through the film. He sat down in the lonesome armchair, stealing one of Clint's snacks when he wasn't looking.

Peter was trying so hard to focus on the film, but there was just so many people around. Then, something bad happened. Bucky's hand accidentally covered his thigh, making Peter jump out of his skin. Peter rushed to the side, his back against the door of the room they were in. He put a hand over his heart, breathing heavily to himself. Shit- they were all looking at him, looking at him like he was a fragile pot that was edging on the side of a cabinet. Tony had paused the film and Peter became the only noise in the tense room.

"Bucky," Peter whispered, "Bucky, please- help me, Bucky-", he was rambling, not quieting down until the ex-assassin took him into the nearest, private, room.

Tony, weirdly, felt a little... jealous (?) that Peter chose Bucky to help instead of him. Maybe the kid lied, maybe it was something to do with HYDRA. Perhaps he should feel good that the kid was reaching out, not upset that he wasn't the one he reached out to.

"Pete, you've been acting weird lately. What's happening?" Bucky asked, sitting down on the soft bed.

Peter didn't sit down however, he just shuffled on his feet. He looked down at the floor, as he tried to find the right words to say. He had to let someone know what was going on, or he was going to do something stupid. He was going to try and do what he did that night Tony caught him.

"Pete?" Bucky tried again, looking him up and down with a concerned look. "You can tell me," he put his open palm over Peter's heart, "Listen to me, Pete, I'm not going to hurt you. I'm not going to be mad, ashamed, or- well, whatever you're thinking. I'm just going to be here."

"I-I-", Peter stuttered, biting his lip hard. He squeezed his eyes shut, just wanting to shout the words out. "Bucky- Bucky, I-I don't know how to say it, please."

"I'll wait," Bucky said, smiling gently at him. He took Peter's hand, waiting for him to make eye contact. "You figure out how you need to say it, and I'll listen. Okay?" Peter nodded, eyes filling with tears, "I'm here, Peter. We all are," Bucky added.

Peter and Bucky stood, and sat, silently for what felt like forever (in Peter's case, anyway). Peter composed himself, as one single tear fell. Skip was in his mind, taunting his words back into silence, but he couldn't take control of the rest of his life. Peter wasn't a kid anymore, Skip couldn't easily manipulate him anymore. He couldn't do this anymore. Telling an adult what happened to him would be liberating. He just needed to let go of the fear he had been holding in for so long.

"I-I was- I was raped," Peter whispered, barely audible for Bucky to hear. But, he did. He heard it all. "And he-he's the reason my identity's out."

Bucky's face went pale, his hand squeezing Peter's even more tight. An anger, or disbelief, came over him and he suddenly felt sick. So, so sick. He didn't even know what to say.

"Oh, Pete," Bucky said, tears prickling in his eyes. "When? Who the fuck did this to you? I'll kill them, Pete. I swear- you say the word and I-", Bucky was squeezing Peter's hand still, imagining hurting whoever did this to a kid so great. He only let go when Peter whimpered, realising he was probably holding on too tight. "Sorry- I- sorry- I just- fuck, kid- I hate that this happened to you."

"H-He, um- he did it when I eight," Peter said, feeling out of the breath.

There was this pressure underneath his heart, getting larger after everything that happened to him. He sighed, his mind overtaken by tragedy. He couldn't think straight, not when Bucky was looking at him with such a crestfallen look on his face.

"Eight?" He whispered, "Oh my god," his hands were shaking, but not in the normal 'i'm scared' way. It was rage. Pure rage, but not at Peter. Never at little Pete, who was a ray of sunshine despite the cards he was dealt.

"Bucky?" Peter said, quietly, with a broken tone of voice, "D-Do you think that's the reason I like boys? B-Because he did that to me? Am I sick?"

"God, no," Bucky replied, straight out of the bed like an overprotective jack-in-the-box. He was quick to reassure Peter. "No, no- no, honey. We are born like we are, it's in us who we are

attracted to. What he did to you? That does not change who you are, kid. It isn't the reason. No way."

"Yo-you really believe that?" Peter whispered, "You do?"

"Of course, Pete," Bucky said, voice low and calm. He put a hand on his shoulder, squeezed it, and brushed the fallen hair that fell over his face. "Who did this to you, sweetheart? Who took your innocence away from you? Because, Pete, I swear- I'll hurt them- I'll kill them-"

"I don't want to- uh- say his name," Peter said, shaking his head with utter stubbornness. "I don't- I can't say it-,"

"Okay, okay, kid," Bucky said, "Look at me, bud, does anyone else (adults) know about this?" He said, watching the scared teen's hands shake. He tried to still his own beating heart, trying his hardest not to trigger the traumatised teen into a flashback.

Peter shook his head, "Please don't tell Tony, or anyone. I'll tell them when I'm ready a-and please don't go looking for the man that did it," he begged, "Please, Bucky. You need to promise me, please."

Bucky thought about it. He wanted to, badly, but he wasn't going to betray Peter's trust to do so. So, although he hated to, he agreed. "Okay, Peter. I won't."

When Peter left, he noticed Bucky crying to himself in the en-suite of his bedroom (and he wasn't sure if he was crying in there to hide it from Peter, or himself).

Whenever Bucky and Peter walked near the others later on, Bucky would always make sure the boy was okay. It was more doting than usual, which people did start to take notice of, but Peter still wasn't ready to talk.

Going to school was still... weird. Everyday was different. Sometimes people would crowd him and ask for selfies, or a parent will stop him and cry that he's so innocent, or tell him that he saved an aunt/son/ uncle (too bad he couldn't save his own), and, the one which he hated the most, they'd mock him for his 'extra-curricular' job.

Lapping the fastest cross-country runner in the class for the second time, Peter was enjoying himself in gym class for the first time. Coach Wilson, it seems, was also.

"Hey kid," The man smiled, sat on a chair as he waited for everyone else to finish running. Peter sat in front of the chair, hand brushing the grass as he did. "So, I'm guessing you know my little brother Sammy?"

"Yeah," Peter nodded, smiling to himself. "He's the coolest. He set me up with one of the best therapist in the country."

"He does that," His coach replied, a look of pride in how he smiled down at Peter (Peter recognised that look from his brother). "I'm glad you're getting help, Pete. The Avenging life isn't fun, kiddo, I've seen how badly it hits Sam. And, damn, I have seen some awful bruises on you. You being careful?"

"As careful as I can be, sir," Peter saluted, although... was that true? Peter wasn't sure. But, he had become a good liar recently and he wasn't about to let everything spill to his P.E teacher (not matter how cool he was, or who his brother was).

Peter had gone out as Spiderman in the weeks after Skip. He did have to keep up a facade, after all.

But, he kept low. He only intervened when he needed to, badly, and he spent most of the time far away from other people. He'd hum underneath his breath, mapping the stars with his fingers. He'd talk to his dad, his mother and Uncle Ben, asking them if he was doing okay? They wouldn't reply, of course, but Peter would relish in the silence. A way to speak his deepest insecurities without someone on the other end to judge him.

He swung past a burning building, his senses bubbling up on his skin. He jumped down, rushing inside. Coughing from the smoke that he accidentally inhaled, Peter couldn't stop. People were screaming at him from all angles, the heat getting closer and closer to him.

Peter grabbed the kids first, whilst also grabbing the small dog as he ran. He put them on the porch, watching as the firefighters took them to safety. Walking back in, Peter realised there was more people in here than he could've anticipated. His eyes glanced over to the wooden table, now a dark, burnt, colour, and realised this must've been a dinner party.

"Spiderman?" A little girl asked, voice innocent and sweet.

Peter turned to her, instructed her to get down to crawl with him. The smoke was getting too much. He made sure that she was keeping up, his gloved hands holding her upper arm. "Come on, sweetie, lets go," Peter tried, managing to get her outside.

"Karen, is there any other heat signatures inside?" Peter said, lungs filled with smoke, as he stood outside (after a few more trips of getting people in and out).

"One more, Peter. But- you've inhaled quite a bit of smoke. I'm not sure if it's safe for you to go back inside. This suit is not fireproof and the fire is getting larger," Karen explained, coming up with loads of reasons why Peter shouldn't put a foot into the door. It was as if she was begging him to stay back.

Peter did it anyway.

"Hello?" He shouted, climbing the crumbling stairs. "Hello?"

Peter looked, wide eyed, at the flames that got larger and larger. He kicked down a door that hadn't been touched yet, freezing up with his rapist, the man he hated so much, was looking back up at him.

He was scared. He was terrified that Skip seemed to be dropping in on his life over and over again. Earlier in the week, a day or so before he told Bucky about what happened, and now. He hadn't seen the man in so long before this, and now? Now he was everywhere.

Skip had bruises over his face, there from the last time they saw each other. But, apparently, that hadn't worked to scare him away from acting confident around Peter. Because he kept talking, even if his swollen lip made him sound just a little different.

A smirk grew on his face, "Oh, Peter, I'm flattered. You came back for me," he drawled, standing up from the floor. "Save me, sweetheart, come on."

Peter couldn't move, even as the fire raged closer and closer. He could feel the heat coming for him, but he still didn't move.

"What are you doing?" Skip yelled, getting a little agitated. "You're going to kill us both, you ass!"

A murderous switch flipped in Peter's head. Walking up to this ugly, evil, man, he put his fist around Skip's throat and raised him up the wall of the room they were in. He tightened his grip, "I

should throw you into those flames, or lock you up so they can consume you. You deserve to die a hard death. But, I'm the bigger person. You will die, but it shall not be of my hand. I've got Tony Stark as a father, man, did you really think that he'll let you get away with this?" Skip looked terrified, clutching at Peter's hands to try and pry himself away. "See how that feels, Skip? Does that hurt? Well, I don't fucking care. That's how you've made me feel. You're going to rot in jail. I'm going to make sure you never see the light of day again,"

Peter dropped him. The man, if he deserved to be addressed as such, collapsed. He took a few deep breaths, before Peter grabbed him and swung them both outside of the window. He pushed Skip off him as soon as they got onto the grass.

Before people started to run to him to thank him, Peter was running away. He ran for a long, long time, until he turned into a random alleyway. The switch flipped again, his mind catching him up with what he did. He threw his mask off, putting a hand over his heart. Tony. Fuck, he needed Tony. He needed to tell him.

Peter grabbed his mobile phone with shaking hands, pressing Tony's contact. It rang a few times, and Peter's heart was beating so fast. He didn't cry. He didn't let a single tear out as he waited. No, he waited until he heard Tony's voice. Because, then, it would be safe. It would be safe to cry, because his dad's always got his back.

"Hey, kiddo! Didn't expect a call from you today, aren't you at Ned's? How is he?" Tony said, the sound of a screwdriver in the background. Peter assumed Jarvis had accepted the call (when wasn't Tony down in the lab).

"Dad," Peter whispered, "Please."

The screwdriver noise stopped. He heard the sound of Tony's nano-suit, and suddenly Tony's voice was a lot louder from his phone. He knew that Tony had jumped in his suit the second Peter sounded as if he was distressed, and it made Peter feel so, so safe. His tears fell, straight away, his hand barely managing to stick to the phone in his hand.

Peter coughed, the physical pain catching up. "It hurts, it hurts- Dad, please. Papa-", Peter cried, "I can't breathe, Papa. I can't breathe."

Peter wasn't sure why he wanted to call Tony 'Papa'. Maybe it was because it was what Peter used to call his dad when he was younger? And Peter felt so scared, so small, that it was like his mind was reverting back into the scared four-year-old who was coming to terms that Papa and Mama were not coming back for him.

Tony heard it, tearing up. He bit his lip. God, what was going on? Damn, his heart couldn't handle this pressure. It couldn't. He felt as if he was always in this stupid suit, just trying to save this kid from something that was wrong (he wouldn't have it any other way).

"Peter, baby, I'm on my way. It's okay. Papa's on his way, okay?" Tony just kept repeating his words, as FRIDAY tracked his kid to an alleyway. "I can see you. Hear that? I'm right here, baby."

Peter jumped into his arms the second Tony came down into the scene. He clutched onto him, something like a koala onto a tree. "F-Fly home, Papa. Want to be home."

"Okay, baby," Tony whispered, turning his head. He noticed a bunch of paparazzi looking at them, snapping photos. For once, Tony didn't have the energy to shout back at them. He flew up into the sky, getting up to the tower.

Peter didn't look badly injured. He did look injured, but he wasn't as bad as Tony was expecting. Something must've happened that wasn't physical, Tony presumed. He placed Peter into his bedroom, up in the middle of the kings sized bed. Throwing a bunch of blankets onto him, Tony rushed to the kitchen to make his boy some hot chocolates with marshmallows sprinkled on the top (whilst making sure that FRIDAY scanned the boy for any fatal injuries). Nothing too bad came back, only some smoke damage that Pete's super healing would easily get to.

Tony placed the hot chocolate mug down onto a coaster, sitting down on the edge of the mattress. He cupped Peter's cheek with his hand, leaning forward to kiss his forehead.

"Baby, we do this too often. Don't we?" Tony smiled, his heart sinking when Peter's beautiful smile didn't turn up. He did, however, pull the blankets up by Tony's leg. He poked the man, hoping his motive would come across. "Want me to come under the covers?" Peter shyly nodded, so Tony did.

"Cuddle," Peter mumbled, grabbing Tony's arms. "Please, Papa. Please."

"Okay," Tony said, laying back on Peter's comfortable (the best choice, of course) mattress. He pulled Pete down with him, letting the boy tuck himself into Tony's side. Peter's fingers played with the arc reactor, which would usually make the billionaire nervous, but he knew that it always calmed the boy down (ever since he came back from HYRDA). "What's up, kid? You sounded terrified over the phone."

Peter looked up at Tony's face, pouting. He hid his face into Peter's chest, mumbling something into the fabric of his t-shirt. "Didn't hear that, buddy. I, unfortunately, do not possess the power of your freaky hearing. You're going to have to say it whilst not eating my shirt."

Peter looked up, biting his lip. He looked so, so, innocent, like a little boy that had just learnt Santa Claus wasn't real. He looked crushed, and Tony hated that he didn't know why. Come on, kid, tell me, he thought. He just needed to know.

Peter's mind hurt. Damn, it hurt so much. HYDRA. Skip. Mom. Dad. Uncle Ben. What else could go wrong? Was he going to lose Tony as well? What about Pepper? May? Ned? Was he just bad luck? Peter was sure that he was just a curse and that he should probably just run away from everyone he loved.

"Whatever is going on up there, Pete, it's not true. You know that I love you, buddy," He whispered, "It's okay, sweetie. I'm here for you."

"Papa- I-I was, uh- I was raped," He said, slowly. The second time he admitted it to an adult. It felt... freeing?

Peter felt Tony's hands drop from his side. His face turned red. It was just like Bucky's reaction. Bucky went from shock, anger and then, sadness. Tony, however, was only anger. He looked down at Peter, before staring up at the ceiling.

"Who?" Tony finally grit out, "Who the fuck thought that they could do this to you?"

"P-Papa," Peter whimpered, digging his hands into himself. "Do-Don't be mad, please Papa. Don't be mad at me. Please don't hate me."

"No, baby, no. Not mad at you. Not at all," Tony said, taking Peter's hands so he couldn't hurt himself. "No," he said. He sat both of them up, so his back was up against the headboard. Peter was over his lap, head in Tony's neck. "What's his name, Peter? You've done so well now. I'm so

proud of you for telling me.”

“Stephen Wescott,” Peter whispered, “People call him Skip. He did it when, um, I was eight and then he saw me again as Spiderman and forced me to take those photos.”

“Fuck,” Tony whispered, gripping Peter close to his body. “Fuck, fuck- I’m going to kill him. I’m going to- Pete. He’s not going to hurt you,” Tony grabbed his hands, their fingers interlocking together. He kissed the boy’s knuckles, thinking about ways he could plummet this ‘Skip’ into the ground. He imagined himself shooting one his beams at the man’s face, slowly. How dare he even look at Peter? How dare he?

“Papa,” Peter cried, “I was so scared. I just froze, Papa. I didn’t think I’d ever see him again and he said that he’d tell you all about what he did to me when I was younger if I didn’t take those photos a-and I was scared that you’d not want me in your life if you knew,” Peter rambled.

“I’d never, ever, kick you out for being brave. My Peter, you are my hero,” Tony said, brushing hair out of his face with a soft sigh. The overhead light lit Peter’s eyes just a little, and Tony could only see them if he looked close enough. He wiped a tear from the boy’s face, kissing his forehead gently. “How could I? I’m your Papa, after all.”

Peter just cried more as Tony spoke. “Don’t kill him. I-I want him in jail for the rest of his life and maybe you-you could scare him, just a little. Please.”

“I’d do anything for you, Pete,” Tony admitted, “So, of course. I’ll contact the best lawyers in the entire universe for you, okay?”

Peter watched Tony, who looked at him like he was his world. His Papa. He grabbed Tony’s hand again, that left him when Tony wiped his tear away, and looked at him in his eyes. He thought about something for a second...

Yes, he loved May. He loved their apartment and he loved being there. But... it wasn’t home anymore. It was where Ben lived. It was where Skip first approached him. It was where HYDRA took him. It was pain, pain he couldn’t forget about.

This room, however? This room was a room that started out as a guest room that Tony reluctantly let him stay in. This room became his, his bedroom that he slept in after Tony rescued him from HYDRA. Then, this room was given a makeover. A makeover that was dressed in all of Peter’s favourite ideals, something that Tony had been learning as their relationship developed. It was a room that he cried in, sure, but one where Tony would always come in to look after him. A room where Tony jumped into his bed, cuddled him until he felt safe. This bedroom? It could be his favourite room in the house.

And he loved Tony and Pepper. Pepper had been his family for so, so, long. Since an EXPO that felt like it was from a lifetime ago, she was by Peter’s side. Tony and him had a rocky start but...they couldn’t be closer now. May was still there, although more on the sidelines now. Peter still felt the love from her. She always did love him, even when she wasn’t his guardian. Even as a babysitter, May showered him with his affection.

He just so lucky to have his family. So, so, lucky.

“Papa?” Peter asked, squeezing the man’s hand. “C-Can I ask you something? Well, uh, two somethings...”

Tony had to pull his mind out of the anger for a second, noticing how scared the boy was. “Yeah,

darling?"

"C-Can you adopt me?" Peter said, "I-I want to live here and I want to be your son. Officially. I want you to be my Papa. O-Only if you want that, of course."

Tony froze.

He had gotten over his whole 'I won't be a good father' phase a while back. Howard might've been a shit dad, but he wasn't. Personally, he thought he was great at it. But... Peter being his? He didn't know... he wasn't sure.

His doubtful thoughts left as soon as he looked back into Peter's eyes. Of course. He already was Papa to Peter, why not make it official? Before he knew it, a grin spread over his face (the last few minutes was a rollercoaster of emotions).

"Yeah," He nodded, his eyes wet before he could control it. He let out a small, breathless, laugh. Nothing was funny, of course, but he couldn't believe how happy that question made him. "Yeah, baby, of course. We'll get those papers sorted as soon as possible."

"R-Really?" Peter whimpered, "You will?"

Tony nodded. He got up, lifted Peter up, and carried him around the room as he was a little toddler wanting to fly. "Yes!" He smiled, excited. "Of course!" His excitement subsided quickly, remembering what Peter told him earlier. He had something else to deal with first. Excitement could come later. "Now, I have a man to scare."

Peter smiled to his feet as Tony gave him a kiss on the forehead, leaving his room. Peter took a sip of his forehead as he listened to the suit fly past his window. Knowing that Tony was on his way to go and scare, maybe roughen up, his rapist, made Peter feel safe inside. And when he opened his phone, he grinned at the first article he saw when it loaded.

'Is Tony Stark secretly the father to superhero Peter Parker?'

Underneath the text was a photo of Peter clutched to Tony's body, the suit's face looking at the camera with a protective face (as protective looking as a robot could manage).

Because Peter had the answer and it was a big, big, yes.

## Epilogue

### Chapter Notes

Thank you all for reading this story! I've never done something so long before and I'd like to thank you for your support! It's been awesome:)

Thank you for the kudos, comments and bookmarks! I hope you enjoy the small epilogue:-)

Tony Stark didn't show mercy. And he definitely wouldn't show any mercy to someone who took advantage of his kid in such an awful way.

Skip Wescott got life in prison, as they uncovered he had done a lot more to a lot of other people.

Peter Parker, now known as Peter Parker-Stark, had never been happier. He went to the hearing, which gathered a lot of media attention, with Tony.

They walked past cameras together, confirming that they were, in fact, father and son. Tony protectively tried to hide Peter's face from the flashes, but it didn't work. They go through, taking photos of the both of them.

Tony flipped the cameras off, getting Peter into Happy's car that was parked up on the side of the road. They smiled at each other as they sat down, sitting hand in hand. They weren't being biased, of course, when they said that they were the best father/son duo in the world (Pepper definitely agreed).

They threw a party to celebrate evil being behind bars, all of Peter's friends attending. Peter spent a lot of his time with Johnny, bodies tangled together on the sofa. Because, wow, they felt very, very, safe together. And Peter? Peter was very happy (to say the least).

Yes, Peter had been through a lot. And Tony knew that. He knew how much his kid suffered, and he was determined to show him how much he meant to him every single day they lived.

May moved in with Happy after a while, which definitely was a surprise to... absolutely no-one. Peter saw it coming from a mile away, knowing his Aunt better than anybody else. He was just so happy for her.

HYDRA was gone. Skip was gone. Peter? Peter was still here. He was alive and kicking, in no pain (unless you counted emotional, which he still had loads of). And they were stuck behind bars, or under the ground, and they couldn't hurt Peter anymore.

Suck that, Peter (so eloquently) said.

After everything Peter went through, now was the time to breathe. His path was an anchor tugging on his heart strings, making it hard for him to breathe at times. But, now? Tony had thrown that anchor back in the ship, letting it float and move on. Just like he needed to do. Move on.

He might've had bad memories in his head, yes. He might've done things that no random teenager had done before. He might be an Avenger, one that everyone knows. But, he's still just Peter. He's

Peter who is strong, kind and funny. He's more than his trauma, of course, and he will be in the future.

Ned and him go to MIT when they turn eighteen, Tony Stark's recommendations behind his back. Johnny goes with MJ to NYU, but the foursome still remain best friends. Peter's roommate at college is a 'Harry Osborn', who's very shocked when the person who's sharing his room ends up being 'the' Spiderman. Peter tells him to call him 'Peter'.

Tony and Pepper have Morgan in his freshman year. Peter's worried that he'll be kicked out of their little Stark family, but of course he's wrong. Morgan just makes them closer, if that's even possible.

Life's good. No 'world-breaking' suffering happens for a while, apart from a few invasions and such. But, they've got that sorted now. Haven't they?

Tony retired the Iron Man suit on Morgan's fifth birthday, putting away the tools for good. They party to celebrate the new chapter, Peter stepping outside to take a breath at the beautiful Stark Lake house (the one he picked, even if Tony suggested otherwise).

Peter's a lot bigger now, at twenty-three years old. His shoulders are broad, and he boasts an impressive six pack over his torso (he does swing around in a spandex suit all day, so he'd be disappointed if he didn't). He's got stubble over his jawline and his face no longer hides the pain in his face. However, it doesn't haunt him like he did it before. He's learnt to deal with it, and show it, to those who love him.

"How come you're brooding, son?" Tony said, sitting beside him on the swing chair that slowly rocks back and forth.

"Mm not brooding, old man," Peter retorts, laughing when Tony makes a face.

Tony looks a lot older. He's got 'salt and pepper' hair, with bits of grey spotted across the thick head of hair he still sports. He doesn't wear the same suits anymore. He lives his life in tank tops and sweatpants, a lot more comfortable than he'd been since he was a newborn. He doesn't have the arc reactor anymore, but Peter can still see the outline of it if he thinks hard enough.

"I am not an old man, thank you," Tony chuckles.

They sit together, swinging on the chair as the wind floats past them. They're just silent for a while, relishing in the calm.

"Does it feel good? You know, to hang the repulsers up?" Peter asks, looking over at Tony's who watching the stream with a look he can't recognise. It's... peace, perhaps.

"Yeah, kid," Tony nods, "It really does. Why do you ask? You thinking on put the web shooters to rest?"

Peter shakes his head, leaning his head against Tony's shoulder. Taking the man's hand in his, he listens into their family's happy laughter inside the home. "No, not yet. I've barely started being a hero."

"That's where you're wrong, kid," Tony says. He gets a piece of paper out of his pocket, shoving it onto Peter's lap. It's a drawing Morgan did in the morning. The hero on the page isn't Spiderman, or Iron Man, it's just plain Peter Parker. "You've been a hero all your life, Pete. Never think any different."

Peter smiles to himself, removing his hand from Tony's to hold the piece of paper up to the sky to see it in its full glory. "What an artist," he says, "Definitely doesn't get that from you, does she?"

"Oh, ha-ha," Tony grumbles, nudging Peter so that his head falls from his shoulder. Peter simply laughs, falling back so he was laying down on the weird structure of the chair. He lays his legs over Tony's lap, his eyes fluttering shut. "You call me the old man, you're the one who's going to bed at 5pm."

"Some of us still have jobs to get to. You might get to stay up all night in your retirement, but I've got things to do," Peter says, flipping Tony off with his eyes closed. When Tony's makes an offended gasp, he continues. "But, seriously, maybe I'll quit when I have some kids of my own."

"I reckon Johnny would look real good with a bump," Tony winks, helping Peter as he sits back up with a huff. When Peter glared, he simply shrugs. "What? It's 2025, Peter. We never know what could happen."

They sit in silence for a while again. It's not an awkward silence. No, it's far from it. It's the most comfortable silence they've ever been in. Birds fill the emptiness, singing beautiful songs that just make you want to get up and dance.

Speaking of dancing, Peter spots Steve and Bucky. They must've slipped away from the party, because Peter watches them as they slowly slow dance to the song that was on the radio in the 'safe house' Bucky took him too. Peter smiles, because he's so, so, close to those two. Their daughter is on Bucky's shoulders, humming the lyrics to her daddy's song. It's a beautiful scene, one Peter can take his eyes from.

"Hey," Tony whispers, bringing him back to their conversation. He puts a hand on Peter's knee and smiles. "Good job, kid," he says, and it makes Peter want to cry.

Because 'good job, kid' was the first thing Tony Stark ever said to Peter Parker, all the way back in 2009 when the younger was only eight years old. It the words that started their whole dynamic. The words that collided two worlds for good. The words that created a bond so strong that no force could tear it apart.

Peter lets out a little tear, smiling into Tony's eyes. They sit like that for a while, until Morgan comes rushing onto the porch with cake in her hair. She asks for big brother Peter. So, Peter waves goodbye to his dad and runs into the living room to attend to the queen of the house.

Tony sits there, swinging, for a while. He smiles at the back of the two kiddos, In disbelief that they're his. When he turns, the sun's started to set.

He's retired. He's got this lovely house. He's got an amazing wife, two amazing kids, and Gerald the alpaca. His life's amazing, thanks to one kid.

It turns out that, yes, he does grow to like Peter Parker after all. It's not just a like, he loves Peter like the son he's become. Yes, he regrets how they argued. But, if he had to do it again? Tony Stark wouldn't change a thing.

He'll just have to let Pepper know that, yes, she is always right.

Tony's closed a chapter in his life with the abandonment of the suits, but he knows that's got so much more left. And when he goes inside, he just watches Peter as he plays with Morgan.

With a sip of his drink, Tony makes a toast to himself. 'Here's to the rest of their lives', he thinks.

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